



Book 2

Communities, activities and places

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Chapter 9 Living together

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- explain the variety and importance of communities in early modern society
- explain how communities supported individuals, but were also sites of division and conflict
- understand the topics discussed in the module and how they relate to the module themes.

Introduction

Welcome to Book 2. The title of the book, *Communities, Activities and Places*, is a clue to the perspective on early modern history that you are about to embrace, which is quite different from that on individuals in Book 1. This chapter will help you prepare for the new approach while providing you with a quick preview of the other seven chapters in Book 2. It will also give you the opportunity to practise skills related to digital literacy and writing.

Why did the module team choose to focus on communities?

The chapter ‘A sense of self: individualism’ (Chapter 8) in Book 1 introduced you to an important historical debate centred on the influential argument put forward by nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897). He claimed that the Renaissance was the time when the modern concept of a self-conscious individual emerged, as illustrated by the growing popularity of individual portraits and the genre of autobiography. His view remained important well into the twentieth century, but in the last 50 years or so it has been challenged on various grounds.

Historians agree that individualism is a distinctive feature of modern societies, but this is now seen as the result of a process that took place over many centuries, not just in the few decades associated with the Renaissance. Furthermore, scholars working on the Middle Ages have shown that well before the Renaissance people could hold a very clear perception of themselves as individuals. Historians have also pointed out that the ‘individual’ Burckhardt had in mind mainly coincided with a male figure who, allegedly, was able to emerge with almost heroic qualities from the straitjacket of religious or political collectives. Renaissance artists like Michelangelo (1475–1564) embodied these virtues, as did successful army leaders. Burckhardt saw these great men as being in opposition to, or above, the norms and conventions shared by most people. This view is now contested, because in fact most of the time even exceptional individuals had to reckon with social and political forces. In Book 1 you examined how members of the nobility conformed to expectations about their rank which were shared across society. Most historians would agree with a recent claim that ‘all individuals, including the great men, lived with and through communities’ (Cohen and Cohen, 2010, p. 476). Historians still write biographies of ‘great men’ (and women), but they strive to place their

heroes into their social and cultural context, not above it. Another important shift from Burckhardt's approach is that we are now more interested in reconstructing the experience of a greater variety of people, including those of humble origins.

Together, these considerations have brought collective life to the centre of historians' attention, but while they agree that communities were a fundamental force of early modern society, they approach them from different perspectives. Social historians have focused on how communities were created and functioned, and on the variety of economic, religious and political activities that took place in them. Looking at how communities interacted with the space, or places, they occupied has been particularly fruitful and this is why the title of Book 2 includes the word 'places'. Cultural historians have extended the analysis by examining the less material but equally important cultural expectations and beliefs shared by communities. It was in the constant interactions fostered by these collectives that social and cultural norms were transmitted, reinforced, or challenged. So to which communities did people belong in the early modern period?

What follows introduces you to some of these communities and to some of the debates that are keeping historians busy.

9.1 Communities: a social and cultural history

The word ‘community’ comes from the Latin *communitas*, which in the Middle Ages identified a village and its legal privileges, especially in relation to other villages or a **seigneur** (Cohen and Cohen, 2010, pp. 476–7). However, historians are now using the term community in a looser sense. Karen Spierling and Michael Halvorson provide a useful working definition: ‘a group of people who perceived themselves as having common interests and, thus, a common identity or self-understanding’ (Spierling and Halvorson, 2008, p. 2).

Exercise 9.1

Using Halvorson’s definition, think of the communities to which you belong.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

The first group with ‘common interests and ... identity’ you thought of may have been your family – and some of you may have in mind a rather extended family, maybe living apart but kept united by memories and love. You may have considered your friends, or your workplace and colleagues, or your trade union. Some of you may have thought of your local community, your church, or the associations where you volunteer. Others among you may have added your city and country – or maybe countries, if you were born outside the place you are living now. You may of course have thought of all of these and more, as you may feel you belong to multiple communities.

Even today we are all constantly immersed in networks of relationships that sustain our lives in many ways. So the quotation cited above, that ‘all individuals, including the great men, lived with and through communities’, does not represent a situation unique to the early modern period. The point, however, is that the range of communities of which we feel part and the way in which this belonging is expressed change with time. Historians agree that communal life was stronger in

pre-modern Europe, in that people perceived themselves much more than many do in western societies today as bound by obligations to the set of communities of which they were members. Since birth, people of every status and degree of wealth were immersed in a web of material, economic, emotional and spiritual support provided by groups of smaller or larger size: families, **kinship**, neighbourhoods, villages, parishes, guilds, confraternities and cities where they grew up, married, worked, prospered, fell ill or poor and died. Based on face-to-face encounters, these relationships were denser than those of modern western societies. Communities were established according to criteria such as age or stage of life, residence, religion, shared occupation or other activities, and of course people belonged to more than one community at the same time. Some of these groups were informal and local, others more formal or with a much larger scope. Even people possessing unique power or wealth knew that this derived from a larger social entity of which they were members (a family, a dynasty or a clan) and that their individual initiative was exercised within the boundaries established by these collectives. As Monica Chojnacka and Merry Wiesner-Hanks have argued: ‘Above all, early modern European[s] identified themselves by their relationships with others. Such connections gave meaning and purpose to their daily activities, and helped them understand and negotiate the wider world’ (Chojnacka and Wiesner-Hanks, 2013, p. 218).

From small to large

One way of appreciating the importance of communities is to start from the most immediate and then zoom out to the largest and most formal. You will probably agree that families represent a form of community, especially if we consider the extended families that were common in parts of Europe. In Book 1 you examined various family patterns and how the domestic space doubled as a workplace, so that more relationships would have developed here than they do among families in western societies today. Bonds between generations were generally strong and families were also where children acquired the first rudiments of education, including training in forms of good behaviour. Families provided critical support to their members, especially at times of crisis: the most destitute were often those with no family. Quasi-family relationships, however, were also built with people with whom no blood relation existed. Take, for example, relationships with godparents, whom parents carefully selected for their children and who

provided youngsters not only with spiritual assistance but also with social connections and resources.

Among other issues, historians have explored if different patterns of family had a bearing on the shape of other communities. You may wonder if the extended families which were common in southern Europe were able to meet the material and emotional needs of their members, making other communities, for example neighbourhoods, less important (and, by contrast, if community help would have been stronger where families were smaller). This, however, seems not to have been the case: Spain and the Italian states had the same strong presence of associations that we find in countries with less extended family bonds. Historians have concluded that a high degree of overlap and mutual reinforcement of communal life was the norm (Lynch, 2003). Yet it is not hard to imagine that neighbourly support would have been stronger in places where migration was high than where family members lived close by. These are the kinds of questions that a focus on communities brings to the fore.

The next community individuals experienced was the village or the neighbourhood where they resided. As always we know less about rural than urban Europe, but it is also important to consider that the size of what counted as a community partly depended on the physical features of a region. Like today, people in a mountainous area felt part of a community stretching for kilometres along a whole valley, while in the plains a community may have centred on a village and its immediate district (Kamen, 2000, p. 10).

Rural villages were often part of the nobility's possessions; their strong political and judicial hold was embodied in the castle or manor house dominating the landscape. However, other forms of village identity and government had existed since the Middle Ages, such as assemblies of male adults who decided on the use of the land. With the strengthening of princely and centralised states in the seventeenth century, communal bonds weakened, but did not disappear. Juries continued to be empanelled to adjudicate on a range of local disputes; for example, throughout our period a local court settled conflicts over the use of water in the area of Valencia in Spain.

Sharing similar forms of living inevitably fostered a sense of community. Households were the basic productive units, but they were part of villages and districts characterised by the same economy. This ranged from growing the same crops to taking part in the manufacture

of basic supplies, or participating in more complex economic processes such as the extraction of metals. All these activities depended on the geographical and physical features of a district, which would now be called the environment, and in the chapter ‘Industry before industrialisation’ (Chapter 15) you will explore how the environment influenced the economies of different communities. These economies were precarious: political or economic factors such as wars or new commercial routes could seriously affect communities. Natural disasters like droughts or epidemics also shook them and in the chapter ‘Responding to disease’ (Chapter 11) you will examine how they responded to the plague, a disease that recurrently spread across Europe until the early eighteenth century.

Plentiful sources have allowed historians to explore in depth communal life in early modern cities, which, as you will read in the chapter ‘Urban communities’ (Chapter 10), was very dynamic. Just walking out of their doors, city dwellers entered a crowded and busy neighbourhood, which was an important ‘stage’ for everyday life, especially because domestic and work activities often spilled out of houses into the streets and squares. Much recent research has recaptured life at this small scale because it was here that alliances and rivalry were experienced, support found, gossip exchanged, social order policed. People turned to neighbours in time of crisis or illness; Chapter 11 will examine the variety of medical practitioners available to communities.

A neighbourhood was an informal community and yet it could also have a more formal status. In highly urbanised societies like the Netherlands or the Italian states, the urban government was divided into districts which were sometimes the size of a few neighbourhoods, sometimes larger. Take the case of early modern Rome, a populous city divided into 13 areas known as *rioni*, each with specific social characteristics which, as Figure 9.1 shows, were sometimes encapsulated in its coat of arms. Besides being a community providing its residents with an identity, a *rione* was a political institution represented by a male resident who was elected to the office for a relatively short period of time. We can consider a *rione* as an institution if we focus on how it worked in the political and administrative context of early modern Rome, and as a community if instead we focus on the social relationships which took place in it.



Figure 9.1 Street sign featuring the coat of arms of the *rione* 'Regola' in Rome as it appears on buildings in the district. Photo: Giacomo Spagnoli. A *rione*'s coat of arms reinforced its collective identity; here the stag may have referred to the many tanners who lived and worked in this area.

If we keep zooming out we encounter towns and cities, which were an important source of collective identity. An interesting question is what happened when cities grew dramatically, as was the case with early modern London: what did it mean to live in a metropolis and how did neighbourly communities relate to the city in its entirety? We may also wonder if people perceived the countries where they lived in terms of large communities, as most people in western societies do today when they think of their nation. This is a complex issue to which you will return in Book 3. However, you may for now consider that traditionally the word 'nation' was mainly used to identify groups that shared geographical origins. For example, the Confraternity of the Lombard Nation in Rome catered for the needs of those who had emigrated to Rome from the northern Italian region of Lombardy, but no precise political entity matched their sense of belonging. Their bond as members of the Lombard nation was not associated with an awareness of the precise boundaries and political identity of this area, which in fact had a complicated history. It had been part of the independent duchy of Milan in the late Middle Ages, had then become subject to the French monarchy and by the mid-sixteenth century was part of the Spanish kingdom. This is in contrast to the modern western sense of nations as entities identified by an administrative system in which local authorities and central government have well-defined, if sometimes contested, spheres of power. Matters were much

more nebulous in the early modern period, and even the largest states like France and Spain were collections of disparate lands characterised by the overlap of administrative, jurisdictional and political local institutions with which monarchs negotiated their power.

Most people in early modern Europe defined themselves in terms of the areas where they were born and, as historian Henry Kamen puts it, ‘local loyalties preceded those to the distant “state”’ (Kamen, 2000, p. 12). A telling example of this is a series of agreements between villages on the French and Spanish sides of the Pyrenees which stipulated that they would keep peace between themselves and stay out of the war waged by their two countries.

Online session 9.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 9.1. This should take around an hour and a half.

Work, religion and rituals

Besides being members of a village or town, people belonged to communities based on criteria other than residency. Among the most important institutions of early modern society were guilds, which grouped those practising the same craft – for example, artisans making leather products, or barbers. Guilds had a variety of functions: they gave economic protection to their members, but were also the source of important social bonds. Marrying within one’s trade was common and fellow members were often asked to vouch for each other in legal or economic transactions (Ago, 1998). As Figure 9.2 shows, badges, seals and coats of arms fostered a guild’s collective identity. An interesting new perspective has focused on guilds as key sites where young men were socialised and learned appropriate ‘masculine’ behaviour.



Figure 9.2 Badge of the Guild of Saint Barbara in the Dutch city of Eindhoven, which grouped militiamen, 1520–4, 5 x 6 cm, silver. Object number BK-NM-2780, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo: Rijksmuseum. The guardsmen wore the badge on their clothes at ceremonies.

Guilds represented trade and crafts, but men from the **middling sort** who, like physicians and lawyers, acquired specific knowledge by attending university, shared membership of local colleges. These might include all the practitioners active in a city, or they might be much more exclusive institutions (only admitting elite physicians, for instance), so that membership was a sign of prestige.

Education expanded substantially in the early modern period, as you will read in the chapter ‘Literacy, learning and the printed word’ (Chapter 12). New schools were established in cities and villages and, although for many education remained a domestic affair, young men who could afford it often left home to attend a college or university. Here they experienced another kind of communal life, which, however temporary it was, had lasting effects on their social life. It was here that they also learned discipline and the appropriate conduct that was expected of their status. What the expansion of education meant for women is a topic of intense debate: schools did exist for girls, but women had no access to universities and for many learning happened at home alongside a range of domestic activities, as Figure 9.3 shows.



Figure 9.3 Giacomo Ceruti, *Scuola di ragazze* ('Girls' school'), c.1720–5, 171 x 194 cm. Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia, Italy. Photo: Archivio fotografico Civici Musei di Brescia. Notice the variety of activities taking place in this domestic scene, including the woman in the foreground holding the girl's finger as she learns to read.

Of course in early modern Europe some of the most important communities were based on shared religious beliefs and devotional practice. The church was often the main landmark in a village and the focal point of social life. But religion is also where some of the most momentous changes occurred as the Reformation ripped communities apart and led to prolonged violence. As you will read in the chapter 'The Reformation and local communities' (Chapter 13), historians have studied the role played by communities in the speedy success of the Reformation. However innovative the ideas of religious reformer

Martin Luther (1483–1546) were, they could only set change in motion when communities accepted them. Across Europe, the pressure of ordinary people was sometimes as important as the initiative of rulers. One of the first visible changes in communities which embraced Protestantism was a shift in the balance of local power, with town councils acquiring functions that had previously belonged to the church.

Historians have also examined the impact of the Reformation on traditional communal life. Convents and monasteries simply disappeared in Protestant countries, but consistories, or vestries, and other governing bodies of the new churches emerged. Staffed by select members, often the older and socially more elite, they took on themselves the imposition of religious discipline on families and households. In post-Reformation England parishes continued to provide the fundamental backbone of local government, giving male householders of the middling sort the opportunity to take part in various administrative decisions. Catholic countries retained a greater plurality of religious communities, including parishes, monasteries and convents, as well as confraternities, which were the main conduit of lay charity and devotion. Despite the considerable clout of some of these institutions – convents and monasteries were often hubs of material as well as spiritual power – they remained under the control of the church's higher hierarchies.

All Christians knew that they were part of the community of believers, but especially after the Reformation the Catholic Church strove to keep and project its nature as a worldwide community which transcended geographical boundaries. Sending missionaries to the New World to evangelise indigenous people was one way to achieve this.

All these communities – villages, neighbourhoods, guilds and colleges, parishes – had a collective identity which ceremonies and rituals helped to sustain. You may remember the splendid ceremony of the wedding of Venice to the sea that you examined in the chapter 'Early modern Europe: an introduction' (Chapter 1) in Book 1. It effectively symbolised the city's maritime power and its yearly reiteration reassured the Venetians of their place in the world. By the eighteenth century this power had substantially declined, but the ceremony remained important, perhaps now as a reminder of the city's glorious past. Across early modern European cities rituals like this brought people together and fostered their sense of belonging. Dressing streets with flags and bunting, parades and symbolic theatrical performances were

the key ingredients of these ceremonies, though they could be much simpler. Historians have devoted much attention to reconstructing their variety and importance to early modern society, and this has required deciphering the meanings of acts that today may seem quite strange.

Exercise 9.2

Modern societies have their own rituals or events. Jot down some of the rituals that bring communities together today.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

You may have thought of rituals linked to the calendar or those with an originally religious significance, like the lighting of Christmas lights. Or perhaps you noted more secular rituals, like weekly football matches or the opening ceremony of a public building.

For some of us these are important occasions and we take part in them fully, but early modern communities were involved in rituals much more frequently and fundamentally than modern western societies are, especially in relation to specific dates in the agricultural and religious calendars. In Chapter 10 and in ‘Popular action: ritual, protest and riot’ (Chapter 16) you will read about festivals and how these playful occasions could also provide people with a channel through which to express discontent.

Communities were the site of collective entertainment which could be on a larger or smaller scale. Among the more contained pastimes, for example, was communal reading among families and villages. This is also how beliefs and ideas circulated, in stark contrast to the atomised forms of entertainment and learning in modern western societies.

Personal bonds were hugely important in early modern society. Cutting across the relationships people built in their communities were **patronage** networks, which you started to explore in the chapter ‘The European elite: nobility and gentry’ (Chapter 7) in Book 1. They developed when a wealthy and influential man or woman – the patron – protected and intervened in favour of people of lower status – the clients – offering access to his or her influence. Everyone in early

modern Europe was aware of the vertical ties linking clients to patrons who, in turn, could be clients of even more powerful individuals. People in western societies today may tend to associate patronage with corruption of a kind, but in early modern Europe these bonds were part of the social fabric and made a huge difference in how life unfolded; the prospects of a poor woman could improve a great deal if she could call on the support of a powerful patron.

You may have started to appreciate that the social and cultural approaches to the history of communities come together fruitfully.

9.2 Inclusion, exclusion, conflicts

You will by now have realised that communities varied by size and sphere of action and that admission to some was informal – living in a neighbourhood was the only requirement to be part of it – while access to others was strictly regulated. To enter a guild a young artisan had to be vetted by senior members; acquiring citizenship, which came with fiscal privileges and the potential to be appointed to political offices, required a degree of wealth and respectable origins.

Research into how people were granted access to communities has highlighted women's very different experience of communal life. Women could only exceptionally join a guild and could not be appointed to any political office. For a long time historians argued that dominant patriarchal values confined women to the domestic sphere, excluding them from the public life men could enjoy. This view has started to change in two main ways. First, women working on farms or in certain occupations, such as washerwomen and market traders, routinely experienced outdoor life. Second, research has revealed that women of a higher status were often involved in the charity provisions made by parishes or other lay associations: an involvement that took them outside their homes too, both physically and in terms of spheres of intervention. As well as recovering women's participation in these public pursuits, this research has also urged historians to rethink the alleged boundaries between the domestic domain and the public arena. Early modern households were not the 'private' spaces associated with family homes in western societies today; they were hubs for a variety of activities straddling economy, knowledge and politics. Moreover, the personal clout on which men based their claim to public roles was based on families' strategies within which women often had important, if informal, roles.

Communities provided people of all levels with the networks of relationships sustaining their economic, social and religious life. Yet recognising the richness of communal life does not mean we have to conclude that early modern society was essentially more inclusive, harmonious and 'organic' than western societies today, as some

scholars have argued, pitching the intensity of past communal life against modern anonymity. Recent studies have highlighted the fact that disputes were rife within and between communities. In general, far from being egalitarian, communities were hierarchical and divided. Although until the eighteenth century the layout of cities was such that people of different social standing lived in close proximity, there were a myriad ways to mark off the inhabitants by rank and wealth. Forms of segregation included the creation of purpose-built institutions for the destitute. Even in villages, landholding peasants did not mingle with poorer labourers and tensions between different groups were exacerbated by bad harvests.

Inclusion and exclusion from communities was regarded as an effective way to keep social order, but hostilities between groups built up and easily escalated. Guilds, confraternities and villages clashed on a variety of matters and legal records show that neighbourhoods were the site of intense disputes, in part because ordinary people took into their hands the control of moral and social conformity. Small-scale conflicts could turn into full-fledged riots and early modern history is punctuated by episodes of unrestrained violence. Food shortages and new taxes exacerbated tensions, leading to rebellions and their harsh punishment. These clashes could also combine with broader political, economic and religious conflicts. Countries were frequently involved in wars which could last for decades, causing immense destruction to communities. Interestingly, however, times of crisis like the plague also stimulated united action by communities determined to survive collectively.

So although communities represent an element of continuity in the early modern period, their history is far from peaceful and the following chapters will introduce you to some aspects of their troubled coexistence.

Diversity

Early modern society was overall less interconnected than western societies today, because travelling was more difficult and trade mostly took place along short-distance routes, although this started to change with the commercial expansion of the mid-sixteenth century. However, early modern communities were far from homogenous and historians have recently started to look at their diversity. This came in two main forms. First, it was a fundamental feature of the composite monarchies that ruled over large areas of Europe; second, it was the result of immigration.

Exercise 9.3

Examine Figure 9.4, which shows a map of the Holy Roman Empire in 1648. Using the information in the key, consider the variety of political entities that made it up.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

You will have realised that the Holy Roman Empire was made up of many different political entities with a range of administrative and institutional arrangements. You may have noticed that some were autonomous cities, while others were states ruled by an ecclesiastical figure or by a duke. The word electorate indicates that the ruler of that state took part in the election of the emperor. All of these were officially under the control of the emperor (of the Hapsburg dynasty), but most of them were in effect autonomous political entities.

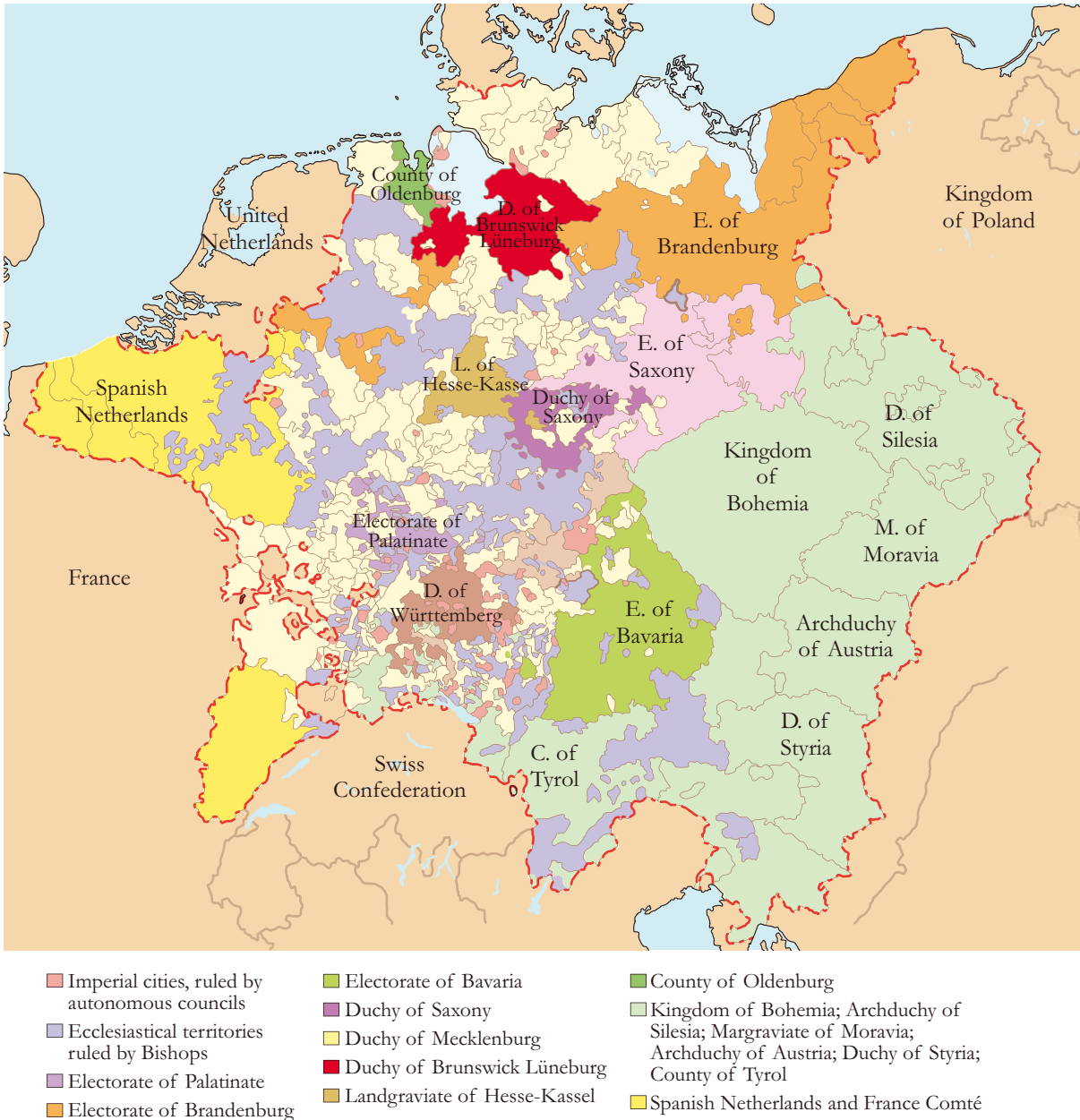


Figure 9.4 Map of the Holy Roman Empire in 1648. Adapted from map 'Central Europe about 1648', Shepherd. W.R., (1923) *Historical Atlas*, New York, Henry Holt and Company. Photo: Open University.

Geographically, the Holy Roman Empire extended from Bohemia in the east to the borders with France in the west; and from the North Sea in the north to the Alps in the south. Its political diversity was matched by cultural diversity: the population spoke an assortment of languages, professed different **confessions** (Protestantism had more permanent success in the north) and cultivated a range of customs and traditions. Being a subject of the emperor did not mean sharing beliefs, customs or even a legal regime with all the other subjects.

Equally diverse, if less fragmented, was the Spanish monarchy, which at the beginning of the seventeenth century reigned over the Iberian peninsula, as well as most of southern Italy, Lombardy and areas of today's Belgium and France. Here too people spoke various languages and had very different traditions, though they were more homogeneously Catholic.

As discussed earlier, a sense of nationality did not exist in the same way that it is perceived today, and yet a strong identity was common in areas of the vast Spanish monarchy (Figure 9.5 shows in red the areas under its rule) that had previously enjoyed independence, for example in the territories of Aragona (today's Catalonia) and Portugal. (In 1640 Portugal had unilaterally declared its independence, after having lost it in the 1580s – hence the different colour in the map – but it was only in 1688 that this new status was formalised.) In the 1640s other rebellions against Spanish rule swept the kingdom and, as you will see in Chapter 16, a temporary anti-Spanish alliance was created in Naples. However, aristocratic families here and in the northern regions of Italy mostly chose to be loyal to the Spanish government (Signorotto, 1996). To exercise political control over their vast dominions, the Spanish monarchs sent out administrators accompanied by extended retinues, and so the Spanish language and customs became fashionable or coexisted alongside more local traditions across vast swathes of Europe.

Of course diversity could be the result of much more brutal occupations, as in Ireland when land was confiscated from the majority of Catholics and given to English and Scottish settlers following the military victory of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) in 1649. This is now seen as a process of economic and cultural colonisation, but even here there was coexistence of a kind: Protestant masters shared their houses with their Catholic servants and this meant the combination of the closest proximity with the greatest antagonism, something that historians have been keen to understand (Laurence, 2008).



Figure 9.5 Map of Europe in 1648. Photo: Open University.

The second kind of diversity was the result of intense economic migration. People moved a great deal and cities like London, Paris, Amsterdam and Rome attracted thousands of immigrants who came from disparate places, driven by hardship and in search of prosperity and toleration. Many different languages would have resonated in the streets and squares where people in different clothing mingled. Broadly

speaking, rural areas were less exposed to this diversity and able to retain greater homogeneity. Yet they too could experience the arrival of ‘foreigners’, for example when, pushed by waves of anti-Semitic persecutions, Jewish families resettled in rural villages of the Holy Roman Empire. There they led very precarious lives and were mostly excluded from Christian institutions, though there is evidence that forms of more peaceful coexistence and even personal interactions could develop (Kümin, 2013, p. 29).

Recently historians have started to reassess the presence of black people in early modern European cities. For a long time the assumption was that they were few in number and were mostly slaves, but a richer picture is emerging and traces of their presence (as shown in Figure 9.6) are the topic of more sustained research. Studies on London have opened up new perspectives. For instance, the records of the parish of St Botolph’s outside Aldgate show that in the late sixteenth century 25 black people were registered as residents – most were servants (not slaves), but one was possibly employed in the local foundry (Wood, 2012).



Figure 9.6 Section of the *Westminster Tournament Roll*, 1511, vellum roll, length 18.3 m. The College of Arms, Westminster, London. Photo: reproduced by permission of the Kings, Heralds and Pursuivants of Arms.

Given this diversity, it is legitimate to consider if integration or segregation prevailed in early modern society. Against a general backdrop of sectarianism and intolerance, the attitudes towards ‘foreigners’ or those from a religious or ethnic minority depended in part on their status. In large cities foreign groups could prosper. Rome, for example, attracted thousands of German craftsmen who were allowed to join guilds and open workshops. Yet if suspicion arose that they might be Protestant, their lives were turned upside down as they were brought in front of the **Inquisition** and banned or jailed (Fosi, 2011). At the same time, Protestant princes and noblemen could travel to Rome on their educational tours. When intolerance prevailed, it could take various forms: a ban, imprisonment or forced conversion. Total segregation was imposed on the Jews in most Italian cities; they were forced to live in closed **ghettos**. In Catholic Spain the Jews had been forced to leave, but elsewhere missionary zeal focused instead on the conversion of Jewish children to Christianity.

Exercise 9.4

Go back and skim-read the chapter so far and consider the question of how divided or cohesive early modern communities were. List the evidence under those two headings.

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

You may have concluded that society was divided, listing the rigid policies regulating inclusion and exclusion from communities, for example the exclusion of women from many institutions; the segregation of the poor; the violence and intolerance towards religious minorities. Yet in the other list you may have noted the proximity in which people lived in towns and villages, their sharing rituals, and the strong support they would receive from the communities to which they belonged, which all made for a life much more centred on shared values and practices compared with modern western societies.

Overall, not surprisingly, power relations determined the nature of the interactions between people and communities: tensions and conflicts were frequent, and violence part of everyday life. Yet what makes the early modern period so interesting is precisely the coexistence of diversity and intolerance, proximity and segregation, solidarity and conflict. As you will read in Books 2 and 3, the communities to which people belonged changed with time as new forms of association emerged and the wider world was increasingly brought 'closer' through trade and colonialism.

9.3 Themes and topics

Your main compass as you travel through Book 2 will be the themes that you have already been introduced to in Book 1: society and social order; religion; work and trade; bodies, health and disease; knowledge and ideas. In particular, you will discuss more closely the one which has so far been less prominent: knowledge and ideas.

Exercise 9.5

Leaf through Book 1 and jot down where you explored issues related to knowledge and ideas.

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

You may have noted Chapter 1, which briefly discussed humanism and how from the sixteenth century onwards new anatomical and astronomical ideas challenged old views. In the chapter 'Bodies, life cycles and illness' (Chapter 4) you examined the main tenets of the ancient medical tradition and how it remained influential across the centuries. You may have also noted Chapter 7, where you considered how ideas about nobility guided the behaviour of the gentry and the aristocracy.

Various chapters of Book 2 continue to explore the importance of ideas in society. This is a lively area of historical research which bridges intellectual and social history. Intellectual history examines the various kinds of ideas prevalent at a time, from political, economic and theological thinking to ideas about nature, and how they were challenged and changed. One of the best-studied topics in the intellectual history of the Renaissance concerns the humanists, who, as you read in Chapter 1, admired and emulated the classical past. We may legitimately wonder what impact the ideas of these few very learned people had on society at large; an interesting perspective is taken in Chapter 12, where you will explore how their views influenced education. Another example is discussed in Chapter 11, where you will read how ideas about contagion shaped the way communities responded to the plague.

Ideas reach people through media: through voices, manuscripts, printed materials. By bringing together intellectual history and the history of technology, historians have recently examined how people communicated in the past. What technologies were available in the early modern period to spread ideas and news? How did people know about peace agreements or geographical discoveries? As you read in Chapter 1, the introduction of print was a momentous innovation, but to what extent this new technology changed society is the subject of much debate. Chapter 12 discusses how printers quickly realised the potential of the market and diversified their output: deluxe volumes were produced alongside cheap broadsheets. Newspapers were another important novelty that soon followed. Yet a fascinating question is whether print replaced or rather coexisted with previous forms of communication, for example manuscripts and oral transmission.

Intellectual history mainly focuses on learned knowledge transmitted in schools and universities, but, as you will examine in Chapters 11 and 15, we should understand ‘knowledge’ in broader terms, as the competence people acquired in a variety of ways. Examples of this are women’s knowledge of the healing properties of plants and the know-how required to make a range of utensils, such as functional guns. From this point of view, we can think of artisans’ workshops and guilds as the places where knowledge and expertise were transmitted from masters to apprentices.

As you progress in your study, you will realise that besides the five main themes, other important concepts are discussed repeatedly in the module, although they may not appear systematically in all three books. To avoid confusion we call them topics, and you should think of them as another useful way with which you can categorise and analyse the past. You are advised to pay attention to them as you read Books 2 and 3. They will be useful tools to bring together the teaching material as you revise the module for the exam. The topics we explore are identities, agency, **gender** and space, and here is a short introduction to each of them.

Identities

In Chapter 8 you assessed how individuals developed a sense of self. Now that we are considering the communal dimension of life, we can ask a different question: how did people build their identities within communities?

Think again of Orseta Frolade Santo, the woman you met in section 1.6 of Chapter 1. Introducing herself to the law court of Venice in 1591, she first mentioned her birthplace, then her husband's name, the parish where she lived, her precise address and then her work. To her, these were the key features of her identity. Assessing early modern identities, historian Fabrizio Nevola has described the situation of a citizen of early modern Siena (Italy) as follows:

[He] was part of the urban community of citizens, of one of the city's three administrative Terzi and local districts; he would be part of a parish (whose boundaries rarely coincided with those of the administrative districts); he would be perhaps part of a large family clan, or live under the shadow of patronage and protection of one; he might adhere to a lay religious community or confraternity; he would probably also be a member of a guild professional organization; he might have a role in some government office. This complex interconnected web of belonging had practical effects in everyday life, through the need to negotiate the duties of participation that each membership required.

(Nevola, 2010, pp. 351–2)

This is an effective description of the multiple identities of this man; the key words here are 'interconnected web of belonging'; an equivalent expression could be the 'overlapping system of loyalties' he held: loyalties to the district, the parish, the family, the confraternity and the guild.

Exercise 9.6

Consider how you would visually represent the multiple identity of the man from Siena.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

You may have thought of a jigsaw, or even of a **Venn diagram** showing through the intersecting areas how someone simultaneously belonged to various collectives.

A visual representation can help, yet both a jigsaw and a Venn diagram would represent just a snapshot of a person's system of loyalties. As Nevola suggests, to build and maintain these loyalties required strategies and effort – ‘the need to negotiate the duties of participation that each membership required’ (Nevola, 2010, p. 352). Belonging was not a condition one acquired once and for all: it demanded what historians often call ‘negotiations’, that is, a constant and intense activity based on compromise and subtle strategies. We may say belonging was high maintenance.

There is another reason why we should consider the system of loyalties in dynamic rather than static terms. They provided people with resources that helped them advance socially.

Exercise 9.7

Read the brief sketch below of the life of Antonio Pecci (d.1662), a grocer from Lombardy, and consider his approach to the communities to which he belonged.

This should take around 10 minutes.

Pecci moved to Rome in the 1620s and joined the Confraternity of Santa Maria dell'Orto, which brought together food retailers from across the city. An extremely entrepreneurial man, he quickly started a side business, lending money; his first clients were fellow members of the confraternity who provided him with the springboard for successful and increasingly greater financial activities. By the end of his life he possessed numerous houses and had lent money to wealthy people across the city. He moved house several times, but his loyalty to the confraternity never abated and he even became one of its wardens. Before dying he bought a chapel in the church of the confraternity to which he bequeathed most of his very substantial wealth. Despite his origins, he appears to have had little contact with the Lombard nation in Rome.

(Canepari, 2007, pp. 182–4; trans. and summarised De Renzi)

Discussion

Pecci exploited the resources, spiritual as well as material, that the confraternity of the grocers offered him and successfully climbed the social ladder. As far as we know he decided to concentrate his interest in this confraternity rather than in that of the Lombard nation, which he was also entitled to join, given his origins. His initial success in lending money may have convinced him that his fellow grocers were his best bet. Despite being a relatively low-status individual, he devised a well-planned strategy and had a proactive approach to the communities to which he chose to belong.

Agency

The case of Pecci takes us to another topic of the module: agency. Chapter 16 explores this concept in some depth, especially in relation to how individuals and communities expressed discontent and organised rebellion. Put simply, the topic of agency will encourage you to consider whether we should see early modern people as fundamentally constrained by their social circumstances and legal and cultural systems, or rather as possessing a degree of freedom and choice. This is an area of intense historical debate. There is general consensus that education, status and wealth enhanced people's self-determination (a peasant in servitude had very little self-determination), but historians are now interested in the various ways in which even ordinary people were able to take some decisions in certain areas of their lives. For instance, you will discuss the actions people took when ill: their economic condition was an important factor here, but they also exercised choice in their search for help.

Social and cultural norms, for example deference, had a strong hold on lives, but people developed strategies to handle them, sometimes adopting them selectively or turning them to their advantage. A concept that you will encounter in various chapters, as mentioned above, is 'negotiations', which summarises this more active role. Exploring people's negotiations does not mean to deny the huge differences in power that characterised the period, but to appreciate that even ordinary people could to a certain extent shape the world around them.

Online session 9.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 9.2. This should take around an hour and a half.

Gender

Over the last decades one of the liveliest areas of historical research has been gender history, and in the chapter ‘Gender’ (Chapter 14) you will be introduced to the many perspectives it has opened on the past. This has been a development from a historical area known as ‘women’s history’ which, having gained popularity in the 1970s, strives to recover the often hard to find evidence of women’s lives. As you will see, gender history focuses on the cultural models informing how men as well as women should behave in their everyday lives. In many ways gender is part of the broader topic of identity, and one important question you will encounter is how in a patriarchal society gender interacted with other criteria of identity such as rank: for example, between a wealthy woman and her male servant, who was subordinate. You will also examine to what extent gender relationships were affected by broader religious and political changes.

Space

Many chapters of Book 2 examine the spaces within which communal activities took place, from the venues where people met up for leisure – such as the tavern or libraries – to the market squares where they did their shopping and traded, to larger-scale spaces like the fields and mines where they toiled. Historians have also increasingly used the category of space to discuss the physical landscape and the environment people shared. This fundamentally determined the economic activities of communities, and was also seen as having major consequences on their health. The sources to make sense of how people interacted with the space where they lived are varied: in Book 1 you explored the structure of a noble household; here you will use a whole town as evidence of how social relationships developed and changed.

By way of a conclusion to this section, it is worth explaining that Book 2 not only broadens the focus of your study by moving from individuals to communities, but also expands your investigations by

introducing you to approaches to the past that have become influential, such as urban history and gender history. Fitting within social and cultural history, they reveal the nature of history as a dynamic area of research. You may have started to appreciate that historians tend to group themselves according to the subject matter or chronology they are mostly interested in, and the approach they adopt. While all historians subscribe to some fundamental features of their discipline, they pursue their investigations in rather different ways and may find new perspectives on the past. At first these may be regarded as specialised or ‘niche’, but usually with time they become mainstream, while other approaches may go out of fashion. This contributes to making history a vibrant field of investigation. The sign that an approach or perspective has been accepted is the foundation of specialised journals, for example *Gender & History*, which was founded in 1989, or *Urban History*, which dates back to 1991. Some of your readings in Book 2 are extracts from these specialised journals.

An aspect of historical research that you will continue to examine is the productive dialogue historians have with scholars of other disciplines such as cultural anthropology, which studies the variety of present-day human societies and cultures. As you will see, ideas first developed by anthropologists have proved very useful to make sense of various aspects of the early modern period, for example rituals.

9.4 Sources and skills

In Book 2 you will examine a wider range of primary sources, such as archaeological evidence to discuss economic activities and court records to make sense of how rioters were punished. You will also analyse a broader range of visual evidence and you are encouraged to keep exploring the objects that have been selected and analysed in the ‘Early modern world in objects’ section on the module website: remember that material evidence is increasingly enriching historians’ investigations. An important skill to learn is an appreciation of the differences between prescriptive and descriptive sources and how to combine sources of a different nature and provenance to get a balanced account of the past. This important step could be described in terms of a ‘triangulation’ between different sources, each one providing a viewpoint on the past. The more you have, the better the view.

You will also be introduced to what historians call reading a source ‘against the grain’. Chapter 14 examines this, but by and large it is a technical equivalent of the expression ‘reading between the lines’. It means that we read documents for information and voices contained in them which are different from the original purpose for which the documents were created. Think, for example, of a deposition in a law court made by a defendant. The reason for requiring the deposition was to ascertain his or her guilt in relation to a specific event, yet by reading the statement ‘against the grain’ historians can recapture the defendant’s voice, that is his or her expectations and views of the legal system, and also information about common patterns of behaviour, attitudes to other people and aspects of everyday life for which we may have little evidence.

Like Book 1, Book 2 is not organised chronologically, but each chapter discusses change and continuity. More specifically, you will be encouraged to think a bit more about the nature of change and revisit the question of periodisation that you examined in Chapter 1. Historians discuss at great length how to account for changes that occurred at a different pace in different areas of life. Sometimes political or religious upheaval brought about a chain of transformations in other areas too, but this was not always the case and in fact it is often fruitful to consider if social and cultural processes occurred at a rate (usually, but not always, slower) that does not necessarily match

that of political history. Which timescale should we favour to define a period? The one based on political events (think of the term Tudor England) or on religious ones (as in Counter-Reformation Spain)? Each label has merits and problems.

Furthermore, historians try to understand changes without seeing them as the succession of stages that inevitably led to what we are today. Of course the present is shaped by the past, but in our investigation of the past we need to avoid looking for ‘forerunners’. This means starting with ideas and activities with which we are familiar today and looking back for what was similar centuries ago. This approach privileges people and actions that we may regard as harbingers of the present. However, we may not find any of them and the risk is that we miss features that, very different from ours, were in fact more important to early modern people. Take, for example, freedom: it certainly did not exist in early modern society in the way it is experienced today, but rather than deploring its lack, it makes more sense to be prepared to find forms of freedom that may have existed. Comparison is a difficult exercise also because what we now regard as absolutely essential may not have appealed in the same way in the past.

It is easy to assume that history moves in one direction, always towards better arrangements (this is a legacy of the Enlightenment, as you will read in Book 3). We may feel sorry for the people experiencing the hardship of early modern life and assume that life in the nineteenth century was certainly better than life in the seventeenth century. However, as you will read in Chapter 12, change occurred that did not always or simply equate with progress and we need to recognise that history moves in different directions; not all the changes that occurred in the past can be placed along a line smoothly leading to the present.

Finally, historians’ worst sin is anachronism; that is, projecting backwards ideas and assumptions that nobody in the past would have held. It is anachronistic, for instance, to talk about a breach of human rights in the early modern period, because the concept was introduced much later. Yet historians commonly use categories of interpretation that originate from current concerns and are sometimes borrowed from other disciplines like anthropology or sociology. This is fully acceptable, as long as historians make clear when they are describing the past and when they are interpreting it. A case in point is gender; another is ‘medical pluralism’, discussed in Chapter 11: nobody in the early modern period would have used these expressions, and yet these

very recent categories have helped historians to recapture important and distinctive features of early modern society.

These are some of the more refined skills you will have to hone. They are not easy and we provide you with plenty of help to get to grips with them. This week you will also practise your skills in using an online database, an important component of your digital literacy. The ratio of independent study to directed study will remain the same in the weeks to come, but overall in the independent study sessions you will be given a more varied set of activities and be encouraged to be truly independent.

Online session 9.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 9.3. This should take around an hour and a half.

Building knowledge

By now you may feel more at ease with various features of early modern life than you were at the beginning of the module. Book 1 has equipped you with a solid foundation for your study in the rest of the module. True, in the following chapters the chronology will gradually extend and in Book 3 you will read more about the eighteenth century than you did in Book 1. But you will be pleasantly surprised by how much what you have learned so far will help and guide you in your new explorations. This applies to both the knowledge and the skills you have acquired, which you will refine and develop. If, however, you are still a little overwhelmed by the unfamiliar language of the sources or you find it hard to identify and summarise the arguments put forward by historians, you should not worry unduly. In Book 2 you will find advice and many opportunities to consolidate your skills before adding new ones. What is important is to take a reflective attitude to your study. The introductory week to a new book is a good place to take stock of your progress.

Exercise 9.8

To begin with, think about which of your views on the early modern period have changed since you started the module. You may have had some deep convictions that have been challenged, or some vague notions that have been refined. Then think about the skills you have acquired or consolidated since you started the module. Consider carefully the feedback you have received from your tutors on TMAs 01 and 02 and make sure you know how to make the best of their advice.

This should take around 10 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

The thematic structure of the module means that as you move from book to book, you will explore the five key themes from different perspectives. The books have different focuses, but you will soon realise there is some overlap between them. While reading the new chapters, you will encounter issues that resonate with questions you have examined earlier. If you find yourself going back to a source or a paragraph in Book 1 because you have spotted a parallel with what you are reading now, you are definitely on the right track. It may be obvious to most of you, but looking again at a previous chapter, even just by skim-reading it and adding a cross reference to another chapter, will save you a huge amount of time later on when revising for the exam. So another piece of advice is to go back to Book 1 every so often and think about connections with Book 2. You are also encouraged to identify links between the chapters of Book 2, so make sure that you spend a bit of time each week thinking about how the issues you have examined fit into the larger picture. This is time very well spent, but, more importantly, it is where the fun begins. As you read more and change your perspective – from individuals to communities to the wider world – your picture of the period will become richer and more rewarding.

Conclusion

Community life shaped the experience of early modern people much more strongly than it does today in western societies. To make sense of this fundamental feature of the past, historians analyse wide-ranging sources to which they apply different methodologies. So shifting your attention to communities, places and activities implies broadening the kinds of evidence you examine and also becoming familiar with a variety of historical approaches and debates. In each chapter of Book 2 you will delve into some distinctive aspects of early modern communal life and learn how to assess the relevant sources and the arguments put forward by historians. There will be plenty that will take you right to the centre of early modern life, in all its variety and complexity. I hope that this chapter has given you an overview of what is to come and that you may find it a helpful framework for understanding both the larger processes and the more subtle issues that you will encounter in the weeks ahead.

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Chapter 10 Urban communities

Deborah Brunton

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the main features of towns and cities in early modern Europe
- appreciate the variety and functions of groups within towns, and how they gave identity to urban dwellers and contributed to establishing social and economic order
- use video and maps to explore urban space.

Introduction

This chapter introduces you to a new area of history in this module – urban history. Historians began to study towns in the 1960s. They initially focused on the economy of cities, but newer work has expanded to include small towns, the social and cultural life of residents, and even the sensory experience of town life: the sights, sounds and (often noxious) smells. This chapter uses urban history to explore the role and make-up of communities within the population of towns. I define the term community fairly loosely, as a group of people with shared goals, interests or backgrounds. Using the term in this way allows us to look at a range of groups – from the tightly defined membership of guilds, with their common economic interests, to members of a social rank within town society, with their shared lifestyle.

The chapter explores groups based around residence, origins, work and social rank, and thus addresses several of the module themes: society, religion and work. In addition, it looks at two groups associated with particular institutions: charities and government. These groups helped to bring order and harmony to urban society, for example by caring for the poor and mediating in quarrels. They also left their mark on the urban landscape in the form of buildings.

10.1 Towns and the urban environment

Towns are a familiar and important feature of modern life. In Europe today, the majority of the population live in towns and cities and people living in the countryside regularly visit them for work and leisure. How does this compare with towns in early modern Europe?

Exercise 10.1

Turn to Penny Roberts, 'Urban society' in the set book and read from the beginning to the end of the second section, 'Urban fortunes' (pp. 58–63). Then summarise the main points of the text.

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

The main points are:

- Overall, a very small proportion of the population of early modern Europe lived in towns. Large cities were not spread evenly over Europe, but were concentrated in Italy and the Netherlands.
 - There is no simple definition of a town: it can be defined by size (although this varied hugely), or by its physical features, economic functions or legal privileges.
 - The relationship of towns with the surrounding countryside is complex – some town dwellers worked in the surrounding rural areas, while peasants sold goods in the town. Industry was carried on in both the town and the countryside.
 - Urban growth varied hugely: it was very rapid in some places, while other towns declined. Cities in the Netherlands grew through trade; other cities developed into administrative centres.
-

Your set book describes early modern towns in very broad terms, and to understand urban life we need to go into the topic in more detail. To modern eyes, perhaps the most striking feature of early modern towns and cities is their size. Although there were a small number of cities that counted their population in the hundreds of thousands – London had over 600,000 residents by the end of the seventeenth

century – smaller towns were much more common and represented a more typical urban experience.

Defining the division between a small town and a village is problematic. Early modern writers usually pointed to the formal status of communities: most towns had certain privileges such as the right to hold markets. Historians focus on the functions of towns as their distinguishing features. Towns were distinguished from rural communities by their role in the local agricultural economy: they served as places for trading livestock and crops, and for processing foodstuffs such as wine and oil. Towns were centres of production, where artisans made goods for the local population such as clothes, shoes and tools, and small industries produced goods such as salt and textiles. Some towns were centres of government, housing local and regional administration, and ecclesiastical and legal bodies. Using this definition, communities containing as many as 10,000 people, or as few as 200, can be considered to be towns. The size varies across Europe, according to the level of urbanisation. In the densely populated Netherlands, quite large towns acted as satellites to cities. In Ireland and Scandinavia, where there were no cities, relatively small communities played a major role in the regional economy.

Even so, early modern Europe was predominantly rural, with a relatively small urban population. In 1500 just 5.6 per cent of the European population lived in large towns of more than 10,000 people, a proportion that increased to 10 per cent by 1800. If we count all communities of more than 2,000 people as towns, the figures rise to 15 per cent in 1500 and 17.5 per cent in 1800: still less than one-fifth of the total European population (Lynch, 2003, p. 28). However, urban communities had an impact greater than their size might suggest. Many more people would have visited towns and cities – to go to markets, to visit family or to seek work – than lived there. It has been estimated that one in six adults living in England in the seventeenth century had visited London (a staggering proportion) and were thus exposed to a way of life very different from that found in farms and hamlets (Friedrichs, 1995, p. 20).

While the proportion of the population living in towns grew only slowly, individual towns and cities could change radically. Large cities grew rapidly in the seventeenth century, reflecting the sharp growth of state administration in cities like London and Paris. From the early eighteenth century, the expansion of cities slowed, while new forms of industrial production caused rapid growth in towns. Specific factors

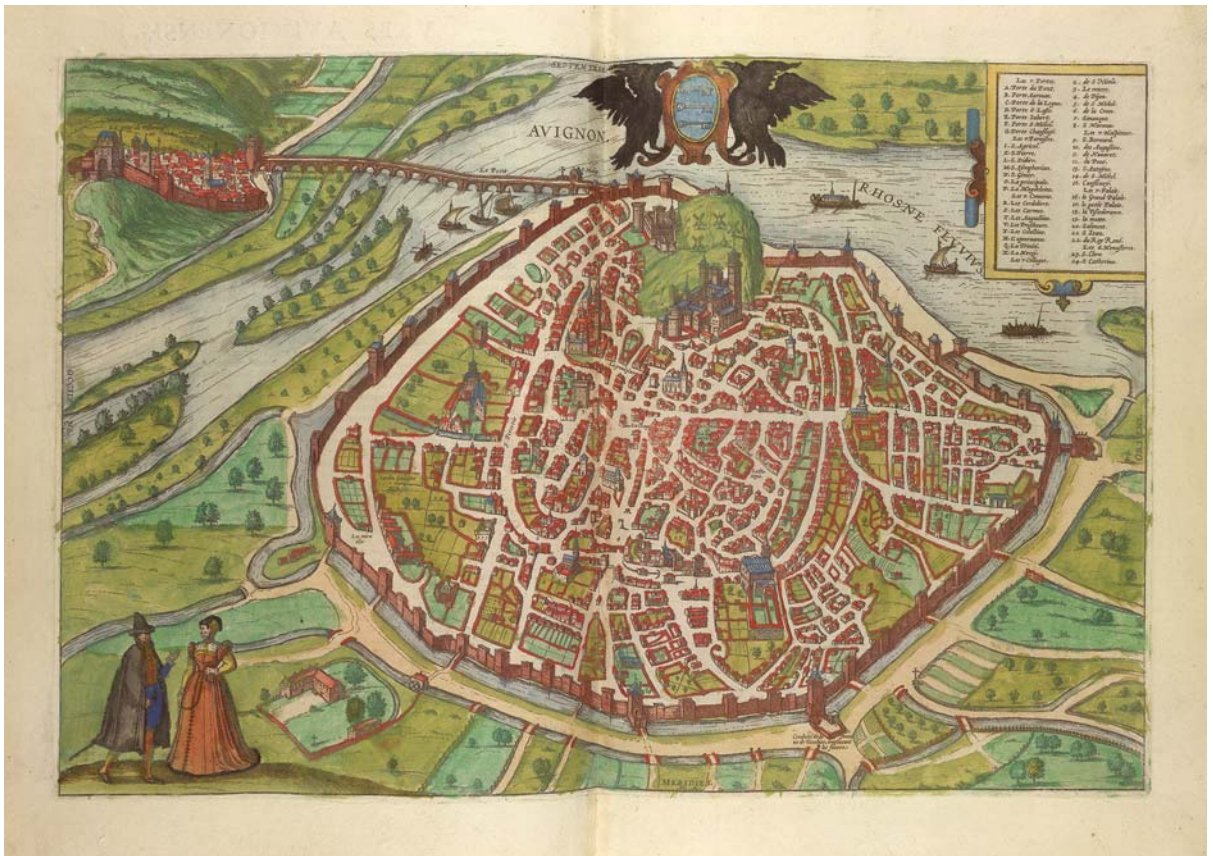


Figure 10.1 'Avignon', from G. Bruin, S. Novellanus and F. Hogenbergius, *De praecipuis, totius uniuersi urbibus, liber secundus*, 1575. British Library, London, 215.f.2 volume 2, 13. Photo: © The British Library Board. An illustration of the layout of the town of Avignon in France. Avignon was a centre for the administration of the Catholic Church. As well as the houses and streets, the map shows important buildings, including the bishop's palace, churches, convents, monasteries and the location of charities.

also determined if individual communities grew or declined: the population of Toledo halved when the Spanish royal court moved to Madrid in the 1560s.

What of the physical environment? Contemporary maps like this one of Avignon in southern France (Figure 10.1) show a clear boundary between an urban area and the rural hinterland. Like many towns, Avignon was bounded by a natural feature – the River Rhône – and defensive walls. Such walls, with their gates and ditches, were used to defend towns in time of war, and in peacetime were used to control the flow of goods and people. At the gates, undesirable people, such as beggars or those who might be carrying infection, were refused entry. When the population of towns expanded, space for new developments

was created by extending city walls to enclose a larger area. Antwerp, for example, added a huge new wall and ditch in the 1550s, around 6 kilometres in length, enclosing a new neighbourhood used for commercial buildings. In Amsterdam, four new canals created areas for the building of grand merchants' houses on the outskirts of the city (Figure 10.2). In the eighteenth century walls gradually lost their defensive functions and were demolished or allowed to fall into disrepair.

These walls were also part of the identity of a town or city. They divided the town – in the early modern period often portrayed as a place of opportunity, order and civilisation – from rural areas where the people were seen as 'bumpkins', poorly educated and capable only of physical labour. In the eighteenth century a Barcelona lawyer complained:

What sort of life is there in a village? An endless circle around the same things. Do you wish to know what you will say, what you will see, with whom you will deal tomorrow? The same as today. Dealing with villagers will strike you as dealing with men from another region, and another century. They will not understand your language, nor will they appreciate your wit.

(Quoted in Amelang, 2000, p. 17)

Within the town walls, paved streets (often, by the late eighteenth century, with street lighting) allowed the free movement of people and goods. As you can see on the map of Avignon (Figure 10.1), there were wide streets and squares – often the venue for markets – with narrower streets running off them. The layout of town streets was very stable, frequently dating back to the medieval period, although the buildings themselves were periodically rebuilt to reflect new architectural styles. Alongside private houses were public or institutional buildings: churches, town halls, markets, law courts and so forth.

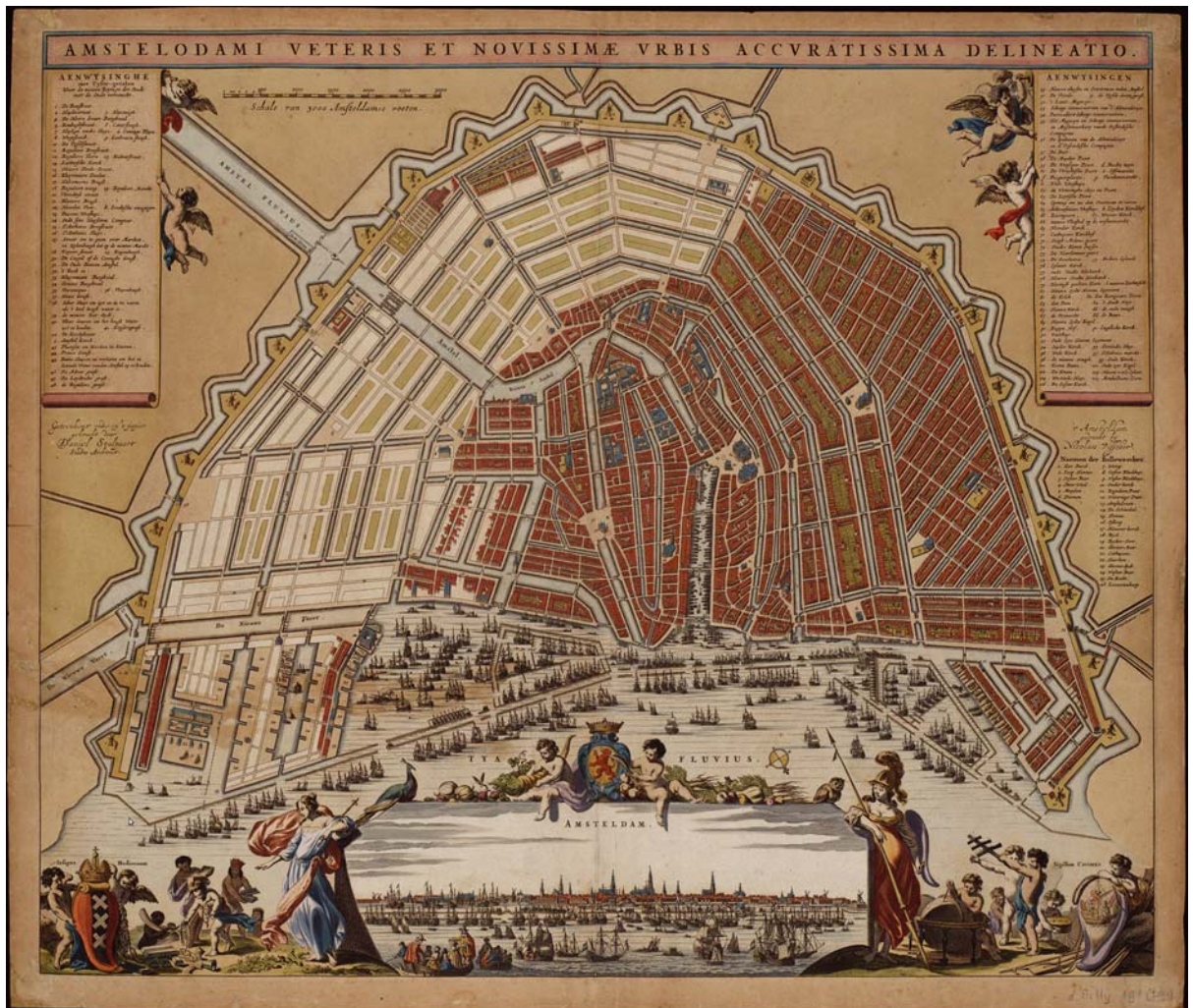


Figure 10.2 Daniel Stalpaert, 'Amstelodami veteris et novissimae urbis accuratissima delineatio', after 1662, copperplate, 49 x 58 cm. Published by Nicolaes Visscher. Photo: Special Collections University of Amsterdam, KNAG Collection, OTM: HB-KZL 102.01.01. In the middle of the seventeenth century, overcrowding within the old centre of Amsterdam was relieved by creating new canals and selling housing plots along them.

Online session 10.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 10.1. This should take around an hour and a quarter.

The number, size and style of public buildings were a sign of the prosperity and civilisation of a town. Anthony à Wood sang the praises of Oxford in 1773:

Oxford is better seen than described – The magnificent Colleges, and other most noble Edifices, standing in, and giving an air of Grandeur to the Streets; – the many delightful Walks; – elegant Gardens; – rich Chapels; – grand Libraries; – the Beauty of the Meadows and Rivers, that on every Side delight the Eye.

(Wood, 1773, p. 2)

Town life had its downsides too. The numbers of people living and working together in close proximity inevitably had a bad effect on the environment. Residents and visitors complained about the crowds, the unpleasant levels of noise from carriages and workshops, the dirt that lay in the streets and around houses, and the resulting smells of horse manure, excrement and rotting waste. Even wealthy, well-ordered households suffered from living cheek by jowl. In October 1660 the diarist Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) recorded: ‘going down into my cellar ... I put my foot into a great heap of turds, by which I find that Mr Turners house of office [his neighbour’s privy] is full and comes into my cellar, which doth trouble me, but I will have it helped [repaired]’. The fact that Pepys and his family had not noticed the smell coming from the cellar suggests that people were used to living in a permanent atmosphere of bad odours (Pepys, 1993, p. 87).

The experience of town life, then, was varied, depending on whether the place was large or small, prosperous or declining. But there were common features too: towns were sites of production and consumption, and they were often densely populated. Towns were also divided, with residents belonging to a range of groups.

10.2 The social town: communities and identity

We can think of town dwellers as a subset of the European population, who lived in a very different environment and had a different lifestyle from rural people. However, within the town, residents belonged to smaller groups. Some groupings were informal and loosely defined – according to age, gender, occupation, place of residence or social rank. Other groupings were based around institutions – religious confraternities, governing bodies or trade associations – where membership was clearly defined. These groupings gave people support in their daily lives, ranging from a sense of belonging and friendship to practical help in times of trouble. They also helped to create a sense of identity and unity and to resolve the conflicts that arose in daily life in crowded towns.

Neighbourhoods

One of the most fundamental groups within the town was a neighbourhood: the people living in a small area of a few streets. Early modern people knew their neighbours well. Although houses constituted private spaces (as opposed to the public areas of streets, marketplaces or public buildings such as churches), in practice there was little privacy. Neighbours often dropped in to each others' houses, and witnesses in court cases reported conversations heard through cracks in the poorly maintained connecting walls. Given the cramped living conditions within the houses of working families, it is not surprising that many residents spent a lot of time outside the home. Urban living required regular trips through the streets. Workmen fetched materials and carried finished goods to customers. Housewives and servants fetched water from wells or streams and made regular trips to market stalls to buy produce (Figure 10.3). Men and women worked in doorways or on the street itself to take advantage of the natural light. Streets and squares were also a venue for leisure – for swapping news with friends and neighbours, for strolling and playing games.



Figure 10.3 Jacobus Vrel, *Street Scene*, c.1654–62, oil on panel, 41 x 34 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 70.PB.21. Photo: Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content program.

Neighbourhoods were places of mutual support, with neighbours performing small acts of kindness such as minding children, sharing food or nursing the sick. Neighbours showed concern for poor people who lived in the area and were well known to them. Often they gave them food or cheap lodging; sometimes neighbours would even defend them against the authorities. In Paris in 1725 the authorities tried to arrest a beggar. She ran into a nearby shop and immediately her neighbours attacked the arresting officers with sticks and stones, forcing them to retreat (Garrioch, 2002, p. 54).

Neighbourhoods were also places of conflict. Inevitably, within any small group there were individuals who did not get on. The records of the Inquisition from Venice show that personal disputes often underpinned accusations of **witchcraft**. And although neighbours might band together during disputes, individuals from different social classes could respond to situations in very different ways. As you will see in exercise 10.2, in Paris in 1725 a disturbance provoked by an increase in the price of bread revealed the social divisions within one neighbourhood.

Exercise 10.2

Turn to Reading 10.1, David Garrioch, 'A bread riot in Paris', 2002, located at the end of the chapter.

Which social groups can you identify, and why might they have acted as they did?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

There are three groups described here: the rioters, who were poor people; the government, represented by Labbé and his soldiers; and the merchants and shopkeepers, who defended the authorities. The rioters wanted to pay a fair price for bread and felt the bakers were cheating them. Labbé and his soldiers were following orders to restore order. The merchants and shopkeepers sided with them, probably fearing that the rioters might attack their shops. Clearly, the neighbourhood residents had their own, conflicting, interests.

In addition to informal neighbourhoods, there were also formal neighbourhood groups. In the Netherlands, cities such as Haarlem and Leiden were divided into *gebuurten*: formal groups that represented households within a few streets. Neighbours elected a 'master' and administrators who collected fees from residents as they moved in or got married, and imposed fines for breaking rules such as failing to attend the funeral of a neighbour. They also mediated in local quarrels. The fees collected by the *gebuurten* were used to pay for communal banquets, and to help the sick and the poor living within the area. The *gebuurten* also mediated between the neighbourhood and local

government. In Haarlem in 1603 leaders of the neighbourhood supported an appeal from a woman to the local authorities to punish her husband, who drank and was violent and unfaithful. Clearly, members of the neighbourhood felt sorry for the wife, and the leaders of the *gebuurten* wanted to stop the husband disturbing their collective peace and possibly damaging the good reputation of the neighbourhood (Dorren, 1998, pp. 177–83).

Formal neighbourhoods were also found in Italy. Siena had its *contrade* and Florence had *potenze*. These were larger than the Dutch neighbourhoods, and their identity was linked to both a specific area of the city and the predominant occupation in that area. For example, membership of the Biliemme *potenza* was drawn from migrant textile workers who had settled around the church of San Barnaba. The *potenza* was a means of drawing the community together: Biliemme's original statute explained: 'What a difficult thing it is for so many persons from different towns and nations and mostly coarse people, as there has always been, and are, in our trade, to come together in communal concord in one council and with one will' (Rosenthal, 2010, pp. 368–9). Like the *gebuurten*, the *potenze* elected their own leaders. They collected funds from wealthy local residents and used them to pay for communal feasts. The *potenze* defended the interests of poorer residents of the city in negotiations with the city government. They also sought to uphold the reputation of the neighbourhood. When the residents of the Biliemme were believed to have brought plague infection into Florence in 1522, the *potenza* paid for the construction of an elaborate **tabernacle** on one of the main streets as a way of showing collective contrition.

Migrants

Florence's *potenze* show how neighbourhoods could overlap with another urban grouping: that of migrants from outside the town. There were high levels of immigration into towns and cities in the early modern period: it has been calculated that between 6,000 and 8,000 newcomers arrived in London each year in the late sixteenth century, and the historian Jan de Vries reckons that between 1500 and 1800 around 60 per cent of people born in the rural areas of northern Europe spent some time living in towns and cities (De Vries, 1984, p. 206). The typical picture of an urban migrant is a young man or woman seeking work, a new home and a better life. Women in

particular moved into towns to work as servants; as a consequence, females generally outnumbered males within urban populations. Young men travelled to local towns to take up apprenticeships, and some were prepared to travel long distances to work in big cities. Half of the apprentices in sixteenth-century London came from at least 90 miles (about 145 kilometres) from the capital.

While many migrants married, set up households and became permanent urban residents, not all stayed in towns. Large numbers of young women worked to save enough for a dowry and then moved back to their native area to marry. At the end of their apprenticeships, young artisans often moved to a new location to set up in business. A reminder of just how mobile early modern people could be is provided by the entry for Catherina Ickermann in the burial register of Schwäbisch Hall (in modern Germany) on 1 February 1695:

Catherina ... was born about 97 years ago in Perleberg in the New Mark of the Electorate of Brandenburg ... at fifteen years of age she went into service and worked at an inn in Weissenburg ... for twenty years; then in Hamburg at a confectioner's for ten years; then in Königsberg in Prussia ... for ten years; then in Bünincken in Württemberg and in Wimpfen for ten years; and then here.

(Friedrichs, 1995, p. 135)

People also took up residence in town for short periods. Merchants might visit a city to transact business for a few weeks or months. Members of the **gentry** increasingly spent the winter months enjoying the entertainment on offer in towns before moving back to their country estates. Bad harvests or war would send people from the countryside into town to seek charity and safety. Equally, during an epidemic town dwellers moved out to the countryside to escape disease.

Place of origin was an important aspect of identity for urban dwellers. Venice had a thriving migrant population, drawn from other parts of Italy and from Greece, Germany and Cyprus. People identified themselves and others by their birthplace, years after they had arrived in the city. This might have been a matter of convenience – distinguishing Oliva ‘the Greek’ from other Olivas in the

neighbourhood – or it might have shown that migrants remained somehow different, even after long periods of residence.

In cities with a diverse and mobile population, foreign migrants tended to cluster together, seeking companionship with those who shared their culture, religion and language. Some streets and neighbourhoods were dominated by migrants from a particular region. In Venice, Greeks lived in the Castello area and Germans around the Rialto Bridge. German and Turkish merchants had their own *fondaci*: a combination of residence, warehouse and market. The mutual support of other migrants was important, given that foreigners were often treated with suspicion by established residents. The records of the Inquisition show that migrant women were much more likely to be accused of magic or witchcraft than their native-born neighbours. Foreigners were also regarded with suspicion in case they introduced disease or dangerous **heretical** ideas. In many cities, foreign traders and workers had to register with the authorities, were subject to extra regulations and paid higher taxes.

Religion was an important basis of identity for migrants in early modern Europe. Members of specific faiths or confessions (who may, of course, have migrated to the city from the same places) clustered together. Communities of believers came together regularly to worship, and the specific rituals of each group set apart Catholic from Protestant and marked the different confessions within the Protestant Church. In Venice there was a Jewish ghetto, a special residential area for the Jewish population, established by the city government in 1516. Residents were shut in at night, but during the day were free to move around the city. For Scottish Calvinist traders living in the Baltic states and Scottish religious exiles living in the Netherlands, having their own church provided a focus for the migrant community, drawing the Scots together for regular services and providing a place to meet, to share news, to celebrate weddings and baptisms, and to mourn deaths within the community. Churches also organised poor relief for Scottish residents and travellers (such as sailors) fallen on hard times (Gardner, 2004).

Occupations

Cutting across groups defined by space (neighbourhoods), religious belief or place of origin was another type of grouping, determined by occupation. As you read in the chapter ‘Work and reward’ (Chapter 5)

in Book 1, towns were places of manufacture, where workers produced a range of goods and provided services for other residents. As a general rule of thumb, the larger the town, the greater the range of occupations. Workers engaged in food and textile production – such as butchers, bakers, tailors, shoemakers – would be found in towns of every size. Larger towns, with a greater market for goods among the population, had residents engaged in many more occupations. Sixteenth-century Norwich, with a population of around 8,000, had workers engaged in around 200 separate occupations, including some highly specialised crafts such as bell-founding and parchment-making. Some towns were associated with particular forms of production, such as luxury textiles, intended for export. But even here, only a minority of craftsmen were engaged in these trades: most workers made goods for and provided services to their fellow townspeople.

Occupation was an important form of identity. In Venice's court records, an individual was often identified by their name and occupation. Many trades were concentrated in specific parts of town, and so people working at the same occupation must have known each other well. Men and women selling goods in the many town markets saw each other frequently and must have gossiped about trade, their colleagues and local events. Workmen in the same trades met as they went to and from their work, or stopped in a tavern for a drink. Trades were grouped together for a variety of reasons. Those that required the movement of heavy materials, such as timber yards, were located near rivers for ease of transport. Others clustered close to their customers: in Paris, for example, booksellers were concentrated around the university. There was also a formal zoning of trades. In many towns, trades that produced unpleasant odours and sights, such as the tanning of leather or slaughtering of cattle, were required to be carried out on the outskirts, well away from residential areas.

In towns, workers banded together in guilds (sometimes also called companies). Established in the medieval period, guilds were a feature of towns throughout the early modern period, when their numbers increased much more rapidly than the urban population. In Naples alone, 51 new guilds were created in the seventeenth century. Although guilds are usually associated with skilled occupations such as weaving high-quality fabrics or furniture-making, there were also guilds for retailers – drapers, grocers, booksellers and so on – and for relatively unskilled workers such as stable-boys and sawyers (Figure 10.4). With new developments in crafts, guilds merged and split to reflect changing

patterns of work, resulting in some extremely specialised groups such as trumpet players and ‘the makers of brass nails for carriages’ (Mocarelli, 2008, p. 167). As you read in Chapter 5, guilds were concerned with protecting trade. They were strictly hierarchical – members were either apprentices (who were being trained), journeymen (who had completed their apprenticeship but worked for a master), or master craftsmen. They were also strongly patriarchal. Girls were not taken on as apprentices; and while women undoubtedly worked alongside their husbands in workshops, they were not generally admitted to guild membership except if they were the widows of masters. However, recent research has found that women were not wholly excluded from guilds. Women were allowed to enter textile guilds in some towns. There were also a small number of female-only guilds, which followed the same form as their male counterparts, in occupations traditionally undertaken by women such as embroidery. Skilled female workers took on apprentices with contracts modelled on those used by guild members, while charities offered training in trades such as embroidery and lace-making to poor girls (Crowston, 2008, pp. 28–44).



Figure 10.4 Signboard of the guild of wood-sawing, seventeenth century, Italy. Museo Correr, Venice. Photo: © De Agostini Picture Library/A. Dagli Orti/Bridgeman Images.

Clearly, many early modern workers wanted to belong to a guild – but what were the advantages?

Online session 10.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 10.2. This should take around 40 minutes.

Guilds provided an expression of collective identity. Members walked with their fellow workers in civic and religious processions, and attended their weddings and funerals. Guilds provided an early form of social welfare: in return for paying a fee, a member's family was guaranteed some financial support if the worker fell ill or died. Most importantly, they protected members' economic interests. By controlling the number of workers setting up workshops, and prosecuting outsiders who tried to trade within the town, guilds ensured that local markets were not flooded with goods and that cheaper, poor-quality goods were not offered for sale – both of which would have driven down the prices received by guild members.

In practice, such a monopoly of local trade was difficult to maintain. Studies of women workers show how the boundaries between guild-regulated and unregulated work were much weaker than previously thought. Some male guild members broke the rules by employing women in their workshops. Women also worked in and even set up independent workshops that operated alongside guild-regulated workplaces.

Conflicts also arose within the ranks of guilds. Since masters took on a number of apprentices during their careers, many journeymen found themselves left in limbo – having acquired the necessary skills but denied the opportunity to set up in business (which was often linked to the right to marry). Journeymen responded by setting up their own organisations to protect their interests and to provide mutual support in times of trouble. In eighteenth-century Edinburgh, journeyman

tailors took collective action against their masters, forcing them to cut the length of the working day. The master tailors fought back, refusing to employ journeymen who participated in strikes.

Guilds were not the only means for workers to fight for their interests. Informal groups of workers (who may or may not have been guild members) also appealed to city governments for help when they felt that they were being unfairly treated. In 1698 a number of weavers in Nördlingen in Germany **petitioned** the town council against the ‘unmerciful, unchristian’ conduct of a rich merchant named Daniel Wörner (1652–1733). He had used his wealth to control the market in raw wool and manipulate the price of the finished cloth. As a result, the weavers received much lower payments for their work than they had expected (Friedrichs, 1979, pp. 268–81).

Social status and identity

Working people – artisans, unskilled workers, retailers and so forth – made up the majority of the urban population, but over the early modern period towns were increasingly home to the upper ranks of society too. Some noble and gentry families were based in towns. In Italy, for example, Florence was dominated by noble families who had their palaces and political power bases in the city. In Britain and France, gentry families had their primary residences on their country estates. Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries more and more members of the gentry chose to spend part of the year (often the winter) living in rented accommodation in town. Towns were also home to wealthy members of the middling sort (discussed in the chapter ‘Early modern Europe: an introduction’ (Chapter 1) in Book 1) such as merchants and bankers, some of whom became immensely rich. Growing numbers of professional men – doctors and lawyers – who made their money by selling their skills and expertise also lived in towns.

Although these wealthy families made up a small part of the total urban population – perhaps around 5 per cent – they had an important role in the local economy. Well-off families expected to live well and to display their wealth and taste. So, like other town dwellers, they bought food in the local markets, and employed builders and servants to

maintain their homes. But the elite spent much greater sums of money than most urban households. For example, they bought more items of clothing, made of more luxurious fabrics and more lavishly decorated. Luxury industries sprang up in towns just to cater for their tastes, such as wig-, umbrella-, watch- and mirror-making, as well as new service providers such as dancing masters and confectioners.

Members of the social elite, and the wealthier members of the middling sort, formed a distinct group within towns and cities. Increasingly, they lived in particular parts of town. In the sixteenth century towns were socially mixed: both poor and wealthy people could be found living in all areas. One street in Venice included the houses of four noble families, the house of a physician and homes of ordinary workers, including a fruit-seller (Chojnacka, 2001, p. 52). In the tall, multiple-occupancy houses in Edinburgh, better-off residents shared a building with workers, though poorer residents were confined to the basement and attics. One tenement included a barber (who paid £75 rent each year) and a servant of the Earl of Selkirk (who paid £84 rent), but also the wife of a less well-paid servant (who paid £28) and a woman who kept a shop (paying £11 rent) (Houston, 1994, pp. 139–40).

In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries new suburbs were built outside the crowded centres of towns, consisting of grand houses inhabited by wealthy families and their servants. In Paris, large villas were built to the north and west of the city in the districts of St Germain and St Honoré (Figure 10.5); in London, the West End acquired its status as a wealthy residential area. Not all members of the urban elite joined the exodus to the suburbs: professional men and merchants tended to stay in town centres in order to be near their places of business. This did not mean that they put up with old-fashioned houses – they modernised the interior decoration to reflect current fashion. In the Scottish city of Dundee, shipowners chose to stay in old tenements in the medieval city centre, but spent large amounts refashioning the interiors with lavish decorative timber and plasterwork.



Figure 10.5 Hôtel Biron, Paris. Photo: © Stuart Robertson/Alamy. This grand house was completed in 1731 for a wig-maker who became wealthy through financial speculation.

Even in public spaces, which were shared between all classes, the wealthy elite retained a clear identity. Style of dress, manner of speech, methods of transport (only the rich could be carried in sedan chairs or travel in carriages), even where someone sat in church or where their family was buried in a graveyard: all these set the wealthy resident apart from the ordinary worker. Shops selling luxury goods – in theory, open to all customers – were in fact the preserve of the wealthy. Unlike the workshops and market stalls where goods had traditionally been sold, these shops provided a dedicated space for the display of merchandise, carried a wider range of stock and catered for customers eager to buy goods in the latest fashions. Window displays attracted customers' attention and invited them to enter the shop and inspect the goods for sale. Apothecaries' shops, selling medicines and cosmetics, were at the forefront of the new retailing fashion (Figure 10.6). Owners made a great show of the variety of drugs and medicines available by storing them in labelled and decorated jars. In 1637 one London shop had nearly 300 jars and pots of drugs on display. Only respectably dressed people were allowed to enter luxury shops, and there were accepted codes of behaviour to follow while browsing. Disreputable-looking people who did not behave appropriately would be ejected, in case they proved to be shoplifters.



Figure 10.6 Claude LeRoy, *An Interior of a Busy Apothecary Shop*, engraving, 30 x 20 cm. Photo: Wellcome Library, London used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This image of an ideal apothecary's shop of the seventeenth century combines the ordered display of drugs to attract customers and the implements used for the preparation of medicines by staff.

Shops created a new leisure activity: shopping. Customers entertained themselves by browsing and discussing the goods with friends and shopkeepers. In the eighteenth century cities and towns offered other opportunities for leisure too, with the creation of a range of new facilities. Where once wealthy men might have mixed with working men when eating and drinking in a tavern, by the eighteenth century they could go to a coffee house to drink new and fashionable chocolate, tea or coffee and discuss politics and trade. Inns and purpose-built assembly rooms provided ballrooms for dancing, as well as card and billiard rooms; theatres offered a stage for travelling companies; lecture theatres, libraries and many new societies provided venues for education. The costs of using these facilities meant that these venues catered for the elite or the respectable middling ranks of society.

Online session 10.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 10.3. This should take around 50 minutes.

Charities

Another type of community within towns comprised members of institutions. In many cases, entering an institution required some formal process. Students had to enrol at colleges and universities. People wishing to join a religious order had to display a strong **vocation** before entering a convent or monastery. As you read in the chapter 'Living in poverty and life on the margins' (Chapter 6) in Book 1, groups of poor people also lived together in charitable institutions. There, those who were sick, elderly people and orphans were provided with food and shelter, often for long periods. In northern Europe, new institutions for the poor were founded in the wake of the Reformation; in southern Europe, the Counter-Reformation provided the initiative to set up new charitable institutions.

For example, a number of institutions were founded in the mid-sixteenth century in Venice to keep poor women from falling into prostitution, which was seen as a threat to social order. The Casa delle Zitelle took in girls believed to be at risk of becoming prostitutes, while the Ospedale di SS. Giovanni e Paolo (known as the Derelitti) was founded to care for orphans and ‘wayward’ girls. Entry to these institutions was strictly controlled. Girls were vetted by the administrators to ensure that they were in genuine need. Once inside the Derelitti, the institution acted as the girls’ family, looking after their physical needs – they were cared for by an all-female staff and provided with food and clothing – and their spiritual welfare. In their mid-teens girls left the Derelitti to go into service, enter a convent or marry. Even then, they did not lose contact with the institution: they were visited by members of the governing body, to ensure that they were not exploited by their employers or badly treated by their new husbands.

While the girls cared for by the Derelitti formed one community, the women who worked for and ran the organisation formed another group. The public life of women in towns has been the subject of recent research, which has challenged assumptions that women lacked any influence outside the home. New scholarship, such as the work of Sheilagh Ogilvie, has shown how working women moved freely around cities, running their own small businesses and participating in the life of neighbourhoods. While elite women in southern Europe were generally less free to walk around the public streets than those in the north, they participated in the public life of the town through charitable institutions. The Derelitti was founded and governed by women from Venice’s ruling elite. It had separate male and female governing bodies, with the women taking the leading role in determining who was allowed to enter the institution, and overseeing the care of inmates. Wealthy female donors also formed another body, the *protettrici*, who visited the Derelitti to ensure that the girls were being well cared for. Female employees of the institution were responsible for the day-to-day care of the girls, and for seeking out donations. Clearly, women joined together to care for other women and girls, thus playing a significant role in the public life of urban communities (Figure 10.7).



Figure 10.7 Frans Hals, *Regentesses of the Old Men's Almshouses*, c.1664, oil on canvas, 171 x 250 cm. Frans Hals Museum De Hallen Haarlem, Netherlands. Photo: © akg-images/Maurice Babey. Group portraits of the board members of charities celebrated the charity, the voluntary work of board members and their collective efforts to improve the lives of the poor.

Much more visible within towns were religious confraternities, which you read about in the chapter 'Popular Christianity and personal faith' (Chapter 2) in Book 1. These provided practical charitable assistance alongside their spiritual activities. Catholic confraternities were voluntary associations, mostly made up of laymen. Their activities were aimed at the glory of God and the benefit of others. Members were pious: they were expected to regularly pray and attend mass and confession in the confraternity chapel or church. Confraternities came together on religious feast days such as Corpus Christi or the feast of the Assumption, when they might process through the streets before attending mass and then enjoying a communal banquet. Members were expected to look to the spiritual and physical welfare of their fellow members, providing food, clothing and prayers for the sick, attending the funerals and praying for the souls of past members, and helping their widows and orphans. They also aided members of the wider community, offering aid to the poor and sick, seeking divine intercession against epidemics and praying for all souls in **purgatory** (Black, 1989, pp. 89–100).

Town government

So far you have looked at a range of groups defined by neighbourhood, origins, occupation and participation in charities. The final group is made up of residents who served on the governing bodies of towns, and so had a special relationship with the rest of the population. This group not only governed the community on behalf of all residents, but also worked with other groups and individuals in achieving this goal.

Exercise 10.3

Turn to Penny Roberts, 'Urban society' in the set book and read the section on 'Urban society and government' (pp. 63–6).

As you read, jot down some answers to the following questions:

- Who governed the towns?
- How would you sum up the work of town governments?
- How did the role of town governments change over time?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

Most towns were governed by elected officials, drawn from the wealthier sections of society, including merchants and members of the legal profession. The structure of government varied between individual towns. Governments looked after the town and its residents. They dealt with emergencies such as famines and fires; they organised the town's defence (through militias), regulated trade (through guilds) and organised welfare (poor relief). The early modern period saw the development of bureaucracies to help run civic affairs, but also a loss of power to the state. There was a growing need to control disruptive behaviour, such as riots.

The exact form of urban government varied across Europe. Generally speaking, larger towns had more complex administrations than smaller communities, and government took the form of a hierarchy of bodies. The government of Antwerp, for example, consisted of 2 burgomasters, 18 *schepenen* (magistrates) and a Broad Council, made up

of representatives of the burgomasters, magistrates and citizens as well as guilds – who had a strong interest in ensuring the prosperity of the community. Members of the various bodies met regularly to discuss how best to maintain good order on behalf of the wider community. Power was concentrated at the top in the hands of the burgomasters, while the Broad Council rubber-stamped policies decided elsewhere (Lindemann, 2014, pp. 47–51). The upper ranks of urban administration were often drawn from a narrow group of families. Venice was ruled by a closed elite of around 230 families, while Amsterdam was ruled by a larger elite known as the *regenten* (regents). In some cities, governing officials were elected by a wider section of the population. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Paris was governed by a body of men representing the 16 districts (*quartiers*) of the city, who were elected by representatives of smaller districts. They were in turn elected by the bourgeois: members of the upper and upper-middle ranks of society.

Although membership of the highest levels of government was restricted to the elite, a much larger number of people drawn from across the community served the government in some capacity. In some towns, neighbourhoods or guilds were responsible for tackling fires, which could devastate buildings constructed from wood and thatch. They also helped to monitor the activities of migrants. Volunteer militias or city guards drawn from the respectable ranks of citizens (but with wealthy individuals holding the posts of officers) helped to defend towns; in peacetime their role became largely ceremonial and social (Figure 10.8).

Urban authorities employed large numbers of people; the authorities in Amsterdam, for instance, had around 3,000 workers engaged in a range of major and minor roles. Cleaners removed dirt from the streets and builders maintained and improved the roads, bridges and harbours that were crucial to the flow of goods and people. Tax collectors ensured a steady income for the town through the taxes levied on goods coming in, while officials responsible for weighing coals, grain and other goods guaranteed that buyers would not be cheated. The more important posts were distributed through patronage – whereby members of government gave positions to friends or family members – or were sold for a set price or to the highest bidder, with the successful candidate recouping the cost from the salary and fees that could be collected. For example, in 1736 Jacob Bicker Raye (1703–1777) purchased the post of auctioneer at the Antwerp fish market, and with

it the right to collect a small percentage of the price of all fish sold there. Bicker Raye employed someone to actually do the work, as he also held posts as collector of taxes on peat and coal (Lindemann, 2014, p. 95). To ensure that holders were competent, some posts were sold only to those who could demonstrate that they had relevant expertise.



Figure 10.8 Cornelis Engelsz, *Banquet of the Officers of the Haarlem Civic Guard*, 1618, oil on canvas, 171 x 248 cm. Frans Hals Museum De Hallen Haarlem, Netherlands. Photo: Tom Haartsen.

The system of patronage and selling offices raises an interesting question: did the elite serve on town governments through a sense of public duty, or as a way of making money for themselves? Were they trying to promote the common good, or looking after their own interests? There is no doubt that some men proved very competent and held high office in government for many years, sacrificing time and energy for the good of the wider community. Incompetent or unsatisfactory members of government were rarely promoted to the highest posts and could be subjected to public ridicule. Those who overstepped the invisible line between the reasonable exercise of patronage and naked profiteering were prosecuted. In the 1540s burgomaster Michiel van der Heyden exploited his position in Antwerp by commandeering building materials bought for the new city walls and using them to build his own house. His activities came to light after

his death, and his relatives were pursued for compensation (Lindemann, 2014, pp. 128–9).

Online session 10.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 10.4. This should take around an hour and 10 minutes.

Coming together: festivals and celebrations

Members of the multiple and overlapping groups within towns regularly came together in celebrations which served as displays of unity. Significant life events – births, marriages and deaths – were occasions for bringing together family and friends. Members of neighbourhoods, guilds and confraternities met at communal feasts. All the residents of a town gathered periodically to celebrate the swearing in of a new mayor or governing body, to show their allegiance to their ruler, or to declare their faith at religious festivals that punctuated the year. Across Catholic Europe communities marked the days associated with saints, while major festivals within the religious calendar such as Easter and Christmas were marked by both Catholics and Protestants. While every celebration was unique, there were many common elements to these events.

Exercise 10.4

Turn to Reading 10.2, Andrew Brown, ‘Holy blood procession in Bruges’, 2011, located at the end of the chapter. This description is taken from an eyewitness account of a sixteenth-century procession in Bruges (in modern-day Belgium), when a relic believed to contain the blood of Jesus Christ was carried through the streets.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- What groups were present?
- What places did the procession pass through?

Now take a moment to look back at the Venetian Ascension Day celebrations described at the beginning of Chapter 1. Can you see similarities?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

All the important groups within the town were present: religious officials from Bruges and beyond, members of the town government, and representatives of trade (guilds) and defence (the guilds of archers). The author later describes the Bruges procession as a ‘town on the move’ (Brown, 2011, p. 37). The procession visited several churches, as well as the city walls, important streets and open spaces.

At first glance, the Ascension Day celebrations in Venice were very different, as they included a trip on the lagoon, but they too involved a procession and a mass. They also included members of the city government and religious officials such as the Pope’s nuncio.

Civic celebrations, like the Bruges procession described in Reading 10.2, presented the town in an orderly form: everyone walked in harmony and in a preordained sequence, reflecting their status within the town, so the clergy, town officials and the fraternity associated with the relic were at the centre of the Bruges procession. The identity of each group was clearly marked, with members wearing special robes or colours and carrying banners. The outward show of order sometimes masked divisions – there are many records of disputes about the order of processions, for example over whether older, more established groups took precedence over newer but wealthier associations.

Some festivals deliberately included elements of disorder. During the Venetian carnival, which took place at the start of Lent, residents threw flour and food at each other and wore masks and fancy dress to disguise their identity. Sometimes the social order was consciously turned upside down by electing a ‘king of misrule’ or a boy bishop to head the festivities, or by appointing the most drunken reveller to be the town ‘mayor’, carrying a tankard as his symbol of authority (Suggett, 1996, p. 82). Such apparently irrational behaviour provided a safety valve: disorder was allowed to take over for a short period, before the usual rules of behaviour were reinstated.

The formal entry of a monarch into a city, or a coronation, provided opportunities for towns to display their unity and their loyalty (Figure 10.9). Many such entries began with some sort of a formal submission: the monarch was presented with a ceremonial key at the gates of the city, indicating that they ruled over the town. The

monarch then returned the key to the civic government in recognition of the authorities' status and joined with the townspeople in processing into the city and watching entertainments provided by the community. These entertainments were designed to be spectacular, but also to contain flattering messages. When Henri II of France (1519–1559, reigned 1547–59) came to Rouen in 1550, he was entertained by mock battles between two 'Brazilian' tribes (the protagonists did include some Brazilians, with their numbers made up by sailors) and between French and Portuguese ships. This conveyed a message about the importance of French colonies abroad and the need for skill and bravery in battle: qualities that a king should possess. Later, the king passed through triumphal arches which carried images from classical mythology depicting gods receiving gifts from Henri, as a symbol of the peace and prosperity that everyone hoped would be associated with his reign (Wintroub, 1998, pp. 466–71).

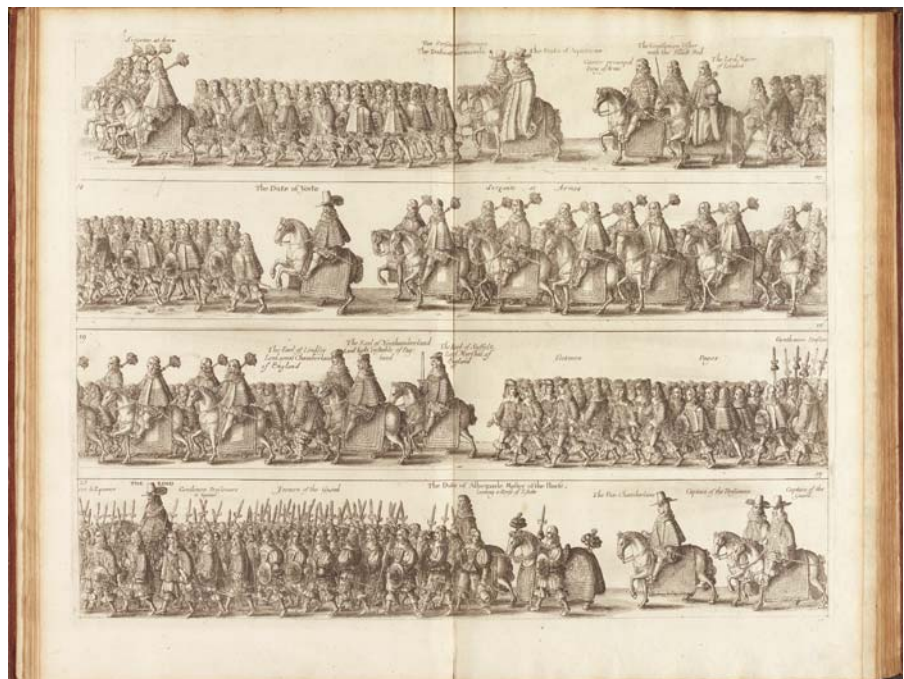


Figure 10.9 Wenceslaus Hollar, *The Cavalcade or His Majesties Passing through the City of London towards His Coronation*, engraving, from John Ogilby (1662) *Entertainment of His Most Excellent Majestie Charles II*, London. Photo: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, S 253.6 Folio A. These images, with their labels to identity the important participants in processions, were designed to convey a sense of order and unity.

Groups within towns used these events to display their loyalty to the monarchy and to the city. In 1604 the Dutch immigrant community in London spent huge sums on constructing one of the seven triumphal arches erected when James VI of Scotland (1566–1625, reigned Scotland 1567–1625) became James I of England, Wales and Ireland too (reigned 1603–25). The others were built by the city and livery companies and the Italian community. The Dutch arch was 87 feet (about 26.5 metres) high and spanned the street. It was covered in sculptures and paintings of kings from the Old Testament, as well as scenes of Dutch ships and clothmaking. The arch included balconies for musicians and 17 young ladies, who represented the 17 Dutch provinces (Grell, 1996, pp. 168–74). Figure 10.10 shows an arch from a slightly later date.

Unity could also be expressed through conflict with outsiders. In Wales, parishes engaged in battles over the possession of a maypole: a decorated pole that provided the focus for midsummer celebrations. Gangs of men from other parishes (often armed with clubs and guns) would attempt to steal the pole. If they succeeded, then the community were unable to erect another until they in turn stole a maypole. These conflicts began in the seventeenth century, at the time when parishes became formally responsible for providing poor relief to the local poor. Conflicts over maypoles may have reflected an increased dislike of outsiders, who could place a strain on the parish's resources (Suggett, 1996, pp. 103–10).

The Welsh battles over maypoles are an example of a new type of festival, and a reminder that while many festivals had a very long history – the celebration of the feast of St John, widely celebrated in Catholic cities, incorporated elements from pagan festivals marking midsummer – they did change over time. With the Reformation, traditional festivals commemorating saints' days ended. Celebrations in Protestant countries tended to be more sober affairs, as uncontrolled drinking and feasting were at odds with the need to live a godly life. Generally speaking, there was a trend away from boisterous festivals, where everyone participated, to more limited celebrations. For example, open-air processions to celebrate the appointment of a new town council were replaced with official banquets for invited dignitaries held indoors. In many ways, civic celebrations can be seen as an opportunity for fun. But for historians they are very significant, representing the social order of the community in miniature.



Figure 10.10 Unknown artist, *The Second Arch*, engraving, from John Ogilby (1662) *Entertainment of His Most Excellent Majestie Charles II*, London. Photo: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, S 253.6 Folio A. Triumphal arches were incredibly elaborate, complex structures. But, like scenery in a theatre, they were temporary and were dismantled as soon as the event was over.

Conclusion

People living in urban communities experienced a very different sort of life from that of their rural counterparts. Towns were perceived to be distinctive in many ways; they were bustling places, where large numbers of people, often born far apart, lived close together, working, trading, exchanging ideas, sharing leisure and quarrelling with their neighbours. As you've seen from the maps and images in this chapter and the online sessions, towns offered very different types of space. Most residents – like people living in the countryside – had only small, cramped living areas, but they stepped out of their homes into a variety of spaces: narrow streets, open squares and marketplaces. They had access to shared public space in taverns and coffee houses, and to grand public buildings in the form of churches.

Towns were home to communities, whose membership was determined by factors such as work, faith and social rank. Work was an important part of individual identity. Individuals might work as weavers, silk merchants or fruit-sellers, and they might also have a collective identity as members of guilds. Similarly, religion in towns was not just a matter of individual but also of collective devotions: people belonged to a parish, or a confraternity; they watched, or took part in, the religious festivals that took over the town streets to mark special days. Social divisions ran through town life: different social ranks had their own forms of housing and of leisure pursuits; rank also determined whether individuals could aspire to join the governing classes or lived among the governed. Most townspeople would have belonged to more than one group simultaneously: a town resident might be a member of a guild and a religious confraternity and belong to a neighbourhood. While town dwellers made up a small part of the European population, they were hugely significant in many aspects of early modern life.

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Readings

Reading 10.1 A bread riot in Paris

Source: Garrioch, D. (2002) *The Making of Revolutionary Paris*, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 115–6.

[p. 116]

At two in the afternoon, [commissaire] Labbé was summoned to another bakery in the main street of the faubourg. ... he took six guardsmen with him and was in time to see the crowd still milling around the shop ... The widow Chaudron, who owned the shop, was away but her shop boy was bleeding from a head wound, all the bread from the three or four bakings of the morning had been taken, and the windows and furniture had been deliberately smashed. The plates, cooking pots, and about four dozen napkins had disappeared ... The commissaire and his men managed to arrest two looters and took them off to his residence some distance away. ... he returned to the faubourg St-Antoine where the enraged crowd was now attacking other bakers' shops. All the shopkeepers were closing their shutters as fast as they could. The parish priest of Ste-Marguerite, a man much respected in the area ... tried to pacify the people, but they went on shouting that the bakers were all villains, preying on those with no work and no money to buy bread. When the commissaire reappeared with his little troop of soldiers he was at first ignored. But he had not gone far along the street before he was surrounded by a hostile crowd demanding the release of those arrested earlier. Shaking their fists in his face and seizing his arm, angry people warned that his last hour had come if he did not let his captives go. At that moment several local merchants or shopkeepers intervened, pushing through the crowd and escorting the commissaire and his little band of men into a nearby house. Almost immediately the crowd returned to the attack, threatening to burn the house down. The soldiers fired several shots over their heads but were eventually forced to release a third young man they had arrested.

Reading 10.2 Holy blood procession in Bruges

Source: Brown, A. (2011) *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges, c. 1300–1520*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 37.

At 10 am the relic was taken from the *burg* [castle] to St Donatian's church where mass was sung, and then it began its journey, through the *markt* [marketplace] down the *Streenstraat* [one of the main streets], over the *zand* [an open space used for markets], towards the Boeverie gate. It was carried by two chaplains from St Basil's, sheltered under a canopy. Before them were carriers of crosses, flanked by the crossbow and archers' guilds, and after them came representatives from all the town clergy, and prelates from outside the town. Closest to the relic were the town officials and the members of the Holy Blood fraternity. The guilds, each in their set order, trailed in the wake of the procession with crosses; several put on plays (dumbshows) of scenes from the Old and New Testaments. At the Boeverie gate the main procession halted, and the town officials and clergy repaired for lunch in St Julian's hospital. The relic meanwhile was borne through the gate and around the perimeter of the town walls, re-entering at the same gate, where it joined the larger procession once more. The magistrates, clergy and craft guilds – in reverse order – accompanied the relic back to St Basil's.

Chapter 11 Responding to disease

Silvia De Renzi

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand how medical practitioners interacted with the communities they served
- explain the concept of medical pluralism and the economic and religious dimensions of medical care
- appreciate early modern understandings of the link between health and the environment
- explain how communities responded to the plague and consider historians' different interpretations of this process.

Introduction

This chapter continues the exploration of issues related to the history of medicine that you first encountered in the chapter ‘Bodies, life cycles and illness’ (Chapter 4) in Book 1. There you examined the key tenets of humoral medicine, common understandings of the life cycle, how ideas about the body circulated in society and who provided care. This chapter takes a different direction in that, in line with the approach of Book 2, it focuses on disease and communities. You will consider two main aspects. First, you will analyse how the range of practitioners providing healthcare interacted with the communities they served. Early modern life was deeply affected both by acute conditions for which, unlike today, no effective drugs were available (so minor infections could kill), and also by a wide range of less severe ailments which could become chronic, or disabilities that resulted from accidents. An important element of continuity between 1500 and 1780 is the assortment of people to whom the sick and their families turned when in need. Consider, for example, that in the seventeenth century the vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, John Ward (1629–1681), practised medicine for many years (Wear, 2000, p. 19). Why would a vicar practise medicine? This chapter will provide some answers by examining all those whom a community recognised as able to cure: physicians, surgeons and apothecaries, wise women, itinerant healers, saints and vicars. Historians of medicine call this ‘medical pluralism’ and you will assess some of its most interesting features.

The second aspect you will examine is how communities responded to epidemics. As you will learn through listening to a podcast, the texts of ancient medicine discussed in detail how the environment, and particularly air, could affect health and disease. You will explore how early modern communities tried to control both routine environmental hazards and the periodic ravages of epidemics. One of the best-studied topics in early modern history is the plague and in a final, extended case study you will examine how historians’ debate on this has evolved.

There are two more general questions that the chapter brings into focus: first, responding to disease had an economic, social and political dimension; second, religious and medical understanding of disease coexisted in various combinations. Both questions provide a fresh perspective on some of the themes of the module, but the chapter also contributes to one of its more specific topics: gender. So if you

regarded the history of medicine as a niche area of historical studies, you may be persuaded to rethink: in fact it makes a fundamental contribution to our broader knowledge of the early modern period.

As with Chapter 4, you will encounter ideas and practices which, viewed from the modern western world of scientific medicine, may appear as the product of ill-conceived assumptions. However, I invite you not to judge the past but to understand it in its own terms.

To start making sense what sick people did in the hope of a cure, let's now move to Bologna, a wealthy city in northern Italy, which at this time was part of the **Papal States**.

11.1 Medical pluralism

Meet Lucia Zaffi, a shopkeeper, who in 1758 reported to a circle of learned physicians the story of her ill health and the steps she had taken to get better. Although the document quoted comes from the middle of the eighteenth century, Lucia describes the actions that sick people had taken for centuries before her. Here are her words (keep in mind that in this context a charlatan is an unqualified practitioner):

I've been suffering for some time past from a pain inside my throat, and feared it was ulcerated. I complained about it to Gioseffo the baker ... ; and he suggested that I consult with the charlatan known as Boschetti, who is currently practising in Bologna's public square ...; and on the 11th of this month of December, the day of the Vow, I went to see the charlatan at his inn, ... and he offered to treat me with one of his medical secrets ... and gave me two pitchers But after I told a friend that I had consulted with said Boschetti ..., that person suggested that I first see Dr. Galli and ask his opinion of the charlatan's prescription, and that I let him inspect the two liquids before using them, and so I did ...; and Dr. Galli having charitably examined my throat, and having told me that, as far as he could see, it was not ulcerated at all, he prescribed a different medicine, and I made up my mind not to use the drinks of the charlatan anymore.

(Quoted in Pomata, 1998, pp. 128–9)

The story is so vivid that you can imagine Lucia going to the baker – perhaps the shopkeeper next door – to discuss her ailment. Friends and neighbours were often the first port of call for those who felt unwell. Heeding his advice, Lucia met a charlatan, though later she may have regretted this decision. What do we know about charlatans?

Charlatans and itinerant practitioners

Today the word charlatan is a term of abuse. In the past, it could be used to mean an impostor or swindler, but also to identify practitioners who resorted to various kinds of entertainment to sell remedies. They often produced the drugs themselves, in small workshops or at home, and then peddled them in villages and towns. They were popular in all

European countries, but the plentiful sources from the Italian states have allowed historians such as David Gentilcore to draw a rich account of their activities which informs what follows.

Boschetti practised in a public square but Lucia met him in an inn, evidence that he was not a local. Charlatans were usually itinerant: moving from town to town, they advertised their drugs from raised platforms – this is why they were also called ‘mountebanks’. They fitted easily alongside other pedlars and stallholders in market squares and wherever commerce and entertainment went hand in hand.

Exercise 11.1

Carefully examine Figure 11.1 and jot down what you think are its most important features. This should take around 5 minutes.



Figure 11.1 Attributed to Dirk Helmbreker, *Itinerant Medicine Vendors in Rome*, seventeenth century, oil on canvas, 60 x 74 cm. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Discussion

The scene is set in an urban context. You probably noticed a man on a raised platform showing a printed sheet to an audience, who are following with varying degrees of interest. Behind him are two other men who are relatively well dressed, a banner and, peeping out from a curtain, another person.

We should not take Figure 11.1 as a snapshot. As you know from the online activities on images as historical evidence in Book 1, pictorial genres follow strong conventions and, if you look at other paintings depicting charlatans, you will see many of the same features. Yet some of the details shown here are corroborated by other historical sources. Take, for example, the printed sheet. Libraries and archives hold copies of handbills produced by charlatans to advertise and boast the virtues of their drugs (Gentilcore, 2006). They would probably be hung up or circulated among the crowd. The use of printed advertisements tells us that at least some charlatans were literate and assumed a degree of literacy in some of their customers. They knew they were catering for a socially diverse clientele.

Contemporary sources sometimes describe charlatans as tricksters using ruses to sell their goods, but in general they were much sought after by people with different ailments. They were by no means marginal in the provision of medical care. What did they sell? Most of their drugs were based on common ingredients, mainly plant extracts, but they used fancy names to boost sales and surrounded their recipes with secrecy. The name ‘Sympathetic Balm’ (Gentilcore, 2006, p. 200), for instance, evoked the effective and pleasing effects of this concoction. Oils and ointments to be rubbed on the body were other favourite products. While charlatans were accused of selling cure-alls, in fact they claimed to treat specific and frequent ailments too, for example problems with the teeth and gums, as well as burns, worms or poisoning. You will recall that Lucia sought out Boschetti because of her sore throat and met him in an inn, in what looks almost like a medical consultation. So some charlatans did more than just sell remedies: they listened to their clients’ complaints.

Charlatans were part of an army of itinerant healers who moved from town to town all over Europe offering cures for specific ailments,

using medical or surgical skills. Among these were oculists able to remove cataracts from the eye, bonesetters, tooth-drawers and **lithotomists**. Moving in search of work was common in early modern Europe and these itinerant healers joined the flow. Take, for example, the German oculist known as ‘Councilor von Köring’, who in 1750 arrived in the city of Braunschweig accompanied by a retinue of six men. He promised to cure those blind from birth and the deaf, to alleviate various pains and to mend harelips. Competition was harsh and features such as a large retinue of servants might help to impress prospective clients. A century earlier, in 1653 another German oculist, Master Jochimb Schmidt, cured the reigning duke afflicted with a cataract, a reminder that itinerant healers catered for the elite as well as ordinary working people (Lindemann, 1996, pp. 153–6).

Could anyone set up business as a healer? One of the most interesting features of the early modern provision of care was that in theory all those who treated the sick had to be licensed by either a guild or another authority. Found in most European countries, this requirement was typical of the highly regulated economic and commercial system of the time. In order to sell their goods or carry out their operations, these practitioners had to obtain a licence from the authorities where they wanted to practise. Often the authority in charge was the local **college of physicians**, who increasingly took on themselves the supervision of other healers. To justify this role, physicians argued that unlicensed practitioners might harm the sick, and that it was imperative to establish the limits of what practitioners did. This may have been a genuine preoccupation, but physicians wanted to reduce the competition from cheaper healers too. Because the licences had to be bought, the system also allowed the colleges of physicians to fill up their coffers.

If someone practised without a licence, the colleges could prosecute them, using complaints from dissatisfied clients. You will recall that Lucia approached a group of physicians, who inspected the charlatan’s remedy. These were members of the College of Physicians in Bologna, who were interested in policing the city’s practitioners. Lucia’s account is now in the College’s archive. In a way, we should be grateful to past physicians’ desire to control other healers as this allows us to hear the voices of patients like Lucia, whose experience would not have been recorded otherwise. We do not know if Boschetti was prosecuted, but the complaint allowed Lucia to be treated by a learned physician whose services she might not have been able to afford.

All over Europe physicians tried to impose control, but they faced armies of healers and, in practice, only a minority were licensed. Physicians used their education to argue for their superior ability to practise medicine. Unsurprisingly, in a society shaped by rank and status, there was a hierarchy among medical practitioners too. But who were the physicians and how did *they* relate to the communities within which they practised?

At the top of the hierarchy: physicians

To become a physician a young man spent many years at a university studying **Aristotelian natural philosophy** and the Hippocratic and Galenic medical tradition. This was a long and expensive process. Women could not attend university, and so only men could officially become physicians.

The humoral medicine they learned was a very coherent system of ideas which dominated medicine until the nineteenth century. Between 1500 and 1780 physicians developed new understandings of how a healthy body functions, but this had a limited impact on their practice, as they continued to prescribe purges, bloodletting and drugs with the aim of evacuating morbid matter from the bodies of their patients.

Most medical literature was in Latin, the learned lingua franca until the eighteenth century. Physicians were usually also versed in other forms of learned knowledge such as classical literature, ancient history and natural philosophy. They believed that this broad knowledge gave them a deep understanding of the causes and symptoms of a disease, marking them off from other practitioners. Although most physicians came from families of the middling sort – medicine was an unsuitable career for young aristocrats, who tended to study the law – they completely accepted the ideology that you explored in the chapter ‘The European elite: nobility and gentry’ (Chapter 7) in Book 1. They also disdained the manual work required by surgical operations or preparing medicines and you can see why, from their perspective, charlatans and bonesetters were crude operators.

A physician’s work mainly took place at his patients’ bedsides. The fees for these home visits were usually beyond the reach of the poorest, but it was common for physicians to have a socially varied clientele, including members of the elite, craftsmen and farmers (Stolberg, 2011, p. 64). Moreover, in some countries arrangements were in place under

which a variety of institutions appointed a physician to provide free care to specific groups of people. Take, for example, the *compagnia* (guild) of the grocers and greengrocers in seventeenth-century Rome, which, besides running a small hospital, paid a physician a monthly salary to treat sick members in their homes (Canepari, 2007). Many of the communities that you are exploring in this book, from confraternities to guilds, regarded providing their members with medical care as part of their responsibility. Furthermore, in some countries ‘town physicians’ were paid by municipal authorities to assist the population.

Exercise 11.2

The following extract describes why in 1549 the council of the village of Murano (near Venice) decided to use part of the revenue from the sale of flour to pay for a physician and a teacher. Read it, and consider what it tells you about perceptions of healthcare in this community.

This should take around 10 minutes.

[O]ne to cure the sick, of whom many die miserably because they cannot access a physician, and the other to teach the children, the majority of whom turn out without virtues because their fathers and mothers cannot afford to send them to school. And this would not happen if there was a physician salaried by this community, because every time a sick person requires him, he would be obliged to pay a visit ... the salary should come from a secure source, so that, knowing for sure that they can have it, they could and would be prepared to serve publicly this honourable community with love and loyalty and without failing to honour their obligations.

(Quoted in Bartolini, 2006, p. 25; trans. De Renzi)

Discussion

The council was keen to ensure that everyone should have access to a physician. This shows on the one hand that learned practitioners were regarded as the best providers of care, and on the other that the council had consideration for the living conditions of the poor. It is interesting to see that providing access to both basic education and healthcare was regarded as the council's responsibility.

This system was particularly developed in the Italian states and in German and Dutch towns, but much less so in England. Contracts like the one in Murano gave physicians a stable source of income: in 1630 almost 55 per cent of the physicians who practised in small Tuscan towns were paid with public money (Cipolla, 1985, p. 300). Overall, learned physicians were a minority of the medical practitioners available to early modern people, but their presence varied from country to country. In some Italian states, for example, the ratio of physicians to population was much higher than in most European countries and this made seeing a physician there a much more common experience. Contracts with town councils were often the first step in a physician's career, helping him to establish a private practice too; for some, this position remained important throughout their lives. Physicians' careers tended to flourish in cities where there was a larger affluent clientele. Ambitious physicians used their competence to climb the social ladder: associating themselves with powerful patients, some became very wealthy, and a few obtained a position at a royal court. Those who continued to study and published works perceived themselves as members of an international 'medical republic', an ideal community bringing together physicians across Europe who shared learning, status and aspirations.

Exercise 11.3

Examine Figure 11.2, a portrait of Ludovicus Nonnius (1553–1645), a learned Dutch physician.

What sort of image did Nonnius want to project, and how did he achieve this?

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

You may have noticed that Nonnius is surrounded by books, the obvious symbol of his learning. In the room is an ancient bust that can be identified as Hippocrates, one of the great medical authorities of the past. Sober clothes enhance the image of a serious physician who based his reputation on deep knowledge of the tradition.



Figure 11.2 Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Ludovicus Nonnius*, 1609, oil on canvas, 124 x 92 cm. National Gallery, London. Photo: National Gallery, London.

So far in your exploration of medical pluralism you have analysed two very different kinds of medical practitioners and how they related to the communities where they practised. Charlatans and itinerant healers fully embraced the commercial dimension of the provision of care and were in theory subject to the licensing process. Cultivating a lofty image derived from their abstract knowledge, physicians considered themselves to be at the pinnacle of the medical hierarchy and abhorred any connections with trade. Of course they too sold their expertise and could make personal gains from other people's suffering and from the charitable imperative of early modern society. Despising manual work, they left the more menial aspects of care to lower-status practitioners: surgeons and apothecaries.

Healing in shops: apothecaries and surgeons

People bought their drugs, or the ingredients to make their own remedies, in apothecaries' shops. In principle, and much like in many places today, apothecaries could sell but not prescribe medicines, and only when a prescription by a physician was presented. In reality, people turned to apothecaries for advice on wide-ranging ailments or to buy drugs they knew could work. They were cheaper and more approachable practitioners than physicians.

To practise, apothecaries had to complete an apprenticeship and then be approved by their guild, but physicians tried in many ways to impose control over apothecaries' activities, for example by requesting that a licence be issued by the colleges of physicians too and by inspecting apothecary shops. In England the London College of Physicians policed apothecaries' activities until the eighteenth century, when these practitioners gained permission to prescribe (Cook, 1990).

Besides the dozens of herbs and other substances with which syrups, lozenges and curative 'waters' were made, apothecary shops stocked many products that were in high demand, such as wax and sweets. They were busy places, with the preparation of the drugs, which included drying, crumbling and mixing ingredients and distilling waters, carried out in the back shop.

Exercise 11.4

Explore Figure 11.3, which shows the frontispiece and title page of a popular medical book.

Which aspects of the apothecary's expertise, as depicted in the vignette at bottom left, are conveyed here? Compare this with the vignette at top left, showing a physician, and think about the different strategies used to represent the two professions.

This should take around 5 minutes.

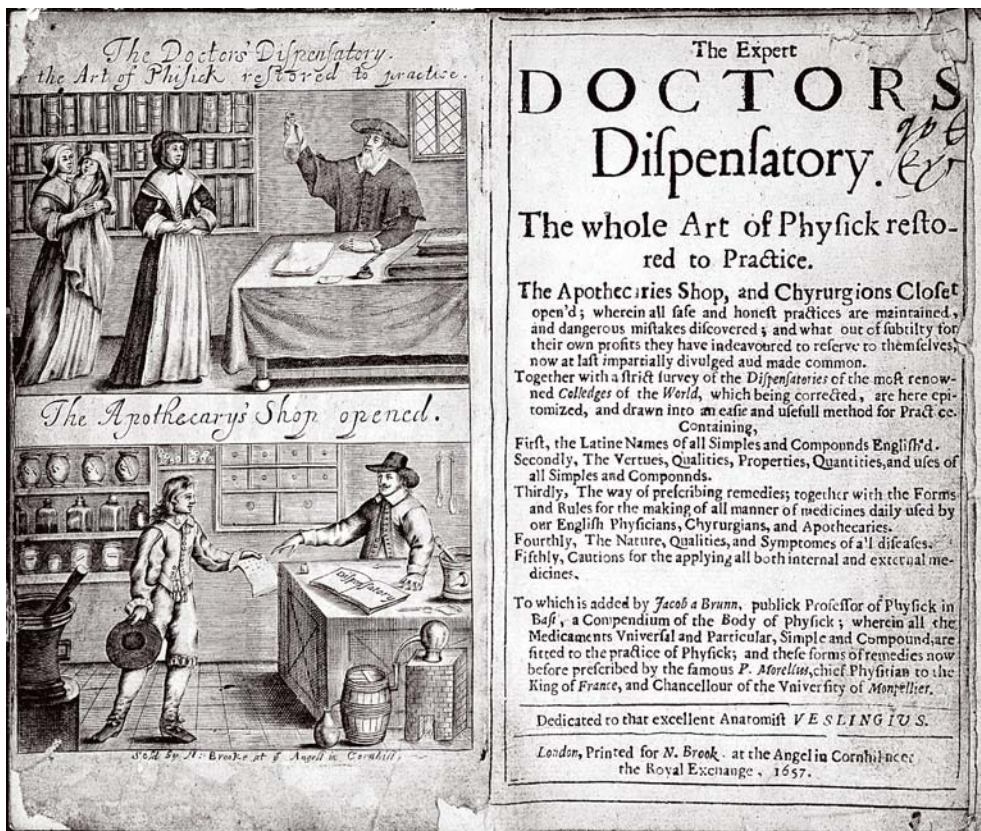


Figure 11.3 Frontispiece and title page of *The Expert Doctors Dispensatory*, 1657. Published by N. Brook, London. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. This was a composite book which included the translation of a Latin work and contributions by various writers.

Discussion

The vignette at bottom left shows an apothecary shop with drawers, vases and jars where ingredients were stored and displayed. You may have noticed a mortar on the table and next to it an alembic (the apparatus used to distil waters and other concoctions). A patient is dutifully handing in a prescription. In the vignette at top left the physician's consulting room is characterised by books. The physician is shown inspecting urine, which was a popular means of diagnosing illness.

Together the images convey the correct order of things: first the diagnosis and prescription and then the purchase of drugs.

Because they bought ingredients and sold drugs, apothecaries were important commercial traders. As longer trade routes were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a wider range of exotic medicinal substances became available to Europeans. Previously unknown plants such as cinchona (quinine) and rhubarb, imported from the American continent or the Far East, were the subjects of great debates over their therapeutic virtues and in turn helped to drive further commercial expansion. The apothecaries' association with trade and commerce meant that they were seen as of lower status than learned professional men. Yet recent research has shown that many apothecaries possessed extensive knowledge and their fragrant shops were the venues for intellectual exchanges of various kinds.

Other places where sociability mixed with medical activities were barbers' shops which men mainly attended for a haircut or a shave. However, because barbers knew how to use razors and lancets, they were trusted to carry out bloodletting or phlebotomy, the most common form of therapy for centuries. When a physician recommended bloodletting, he would not perform it, but called for a barber. Furthermore, activities that we regard as merely cosmetic, like shaving, were at the time seen as a form of personal hygiene. Although people rarely bathed in order to wash the body, they were concerned with the regular elimination of bodily excretions. Sweating, for example, was seen as a way to purge the body, which is why bathhouses and stoves (where people would be made to sweat in steam baths) were another popular 'health establishment' in towns.

Barbers were also skilled at dressing wounds and treating the results of the very frequent accidents of early modern life, such as burns. They often practised minor surgery too, removing skin blemishes or external growths and lancing boils. This is why they were often known as barber-surgeons. Some barber-surgeons acquired more specialised techniques, for example removing kidney stones and setting broken bones. They competed with the specialised itinerant healers discussed above, but claimed to be better trained. Barbers and surgeons usually qualified through apprenticeships, but in countries like the Italian states universities offered degrees in surgery, thus creating a category of learned surgeons who had more in common with physicians than with barbers. While some surgeons specialised in military surgery and followed armies, in general barber-surgeons based their activities in a shop, where they kept an array of instruments; if required, they paid visits to the sick.

Research on the London Barber-Surgeons Company has shown that these practitioners were distributed across the city, in contrast to the apothecaries, who tended to cluster along the main commercial streets. This suggests that barbers were needed more regularly and were more entrenched in the life of neighbourhoods (Pelling, 1986, pp. 85–6). They were also found in less respectable areas. Because they offered services related to cosmetics and male ‘grooming’ as well as health, barber shops tended to be associated with male entertainments, from drinking to gambling and prostitution. A quarter of the members of the London Barber-Surgeons Company had another occupation (Pelling, 1986, p. 84), while in Norwich a high proportion of barbers were involved in brewing and selling drinks (Pelling, 1982, p. 505). Evidence from other European cities like Rome shows a similar pattern in the number and distribution of barbers’ shops.

Exercise 11.5

Explore the objects in Figure 11.4 and read the description provided, taken from the website of the museum that holds them.

What conclusion can you draw about the original owner of these instruments?

This should take around 5 minutes.



Figure 11.4 Case of surgical instruments, 1650–1700. Held at the Science Museum in London. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

This case bears the [London Barber-Surgeons] Company coat of arms on the lid and inside the case, indicating that the owner was a member of the guild. The instrument case contains scissors, tongue depressor, forceps, a scoop, scraper and seven lancets. The case is covered in shagreen (stained fish skin) and has silver decoration. The double-edged lancets have tortoiseshell covers which are hinged with screws. These were used to open the veins in bloodletting. The various blades were used on an assortment of veins in different locations around the body.

(Science Museum, n.d.)

Discussion

This is a complete set of tools which could be used in a variety of medical interventions. The precious case and decorated tools indicate that this was a deluxe set which probably belonged to a successful and well-established member of the company, probably a wealthy and respected barber-surgeon.

For a long time, historians of medicine mainly focused on the role of learned physicians and did not consider the activities of other healers as an appropriate topic of research. From the 1970s, however, as new questions started to be asked about how ordinary people coped with illness, historians' attention has included practitioners who had previously been ignored. A good example of this is the reassessment of the care provided by women, who, as historians are increasingly discovering, acted in a variety of capacities.

Women as healers

Whenever an illness struck in a family, women provided the basic nursing care, but they often took a more active role too, advising on remedies and preparing concoctions: a practice known as domestic medicine. They did this by drawing on knowledge they had acquired informally. Traditionally portrayed as 'old women's wisdom', this was in fact the backbone of domestic medical care and historians have now started to analyse it as an important part of the wider domestic economy (Leong, 2008). You have seen in the chapter 'Work and reward' (Chapter 5) in Book 1 that households were the main productive unit of the early modern period, but they could also be an important hub for the exchange of knowledge, for example through recipes that were collected and passed down the generations. In this framework women were recognised as important sources of therapeutic knowledge. Women, however, were also medically active outside their homes.

As historian Deborah Harkness has shown, London parishes supplemented the support provided to poor women if they looked after sick people in the neighbourhood. A woman who was prosecuted by the College of Physicians of London in 1594 admitted 'that she had practiced medicine here in London for many years already and had given internal purgative potions ... to a hundred or more men' (Harkness, 2008, p. 82). Women like this one never gained a licence to cure and yet they were much sought after in towns and neighbourhoods. They combined the provision of medical care with

other occupations (sometimes seasonal), or started to provide care at a later stage of their lives. This fits with the fluidity between occupations that you explored in Chapter 5.

Women developed specialised skills. As you read in Chapter 4, births were almost exclusively the remit of midwives, who also advised more generally on female diseases. However, it was not unusual for women to practise in areas often associated with men: a woman who married a surgeon, for example, often practised surgery and continued to do so even if her husband died. Women's medical presence in the urban context is complemented by the care aristocratic women provided to the inhabitants of their estates in rural areas. Although they were banned from university, some of them became very knowledgeable in matters of therapy and drugs, as Figure 11.5 illustrates. Lady Grace Mildmay (1552–1620), for instance, devoted much of her time to preparing drugs for the sick poor of her estate in Northamptonshire, while Anna of Saxony (1532–1585) – the electress of the important German state of Saxony – was so involved in this process that one of her cabinets was marked 'all kinds of medicines for the poor sick people' (Rankin, 2007, p. 28).

The activities of these women raise an important question: what care was available in rural areas, where, as you know, the majority of the early modern European population lived? Sources are scarce and historians have only begun to work on this. In countries with a relatively high density of towns and villages, a visit to an apothecary or barber shop could take place during a trip to the nearest market. In more sparsely populated areas, sick peasants relied entirely on domestic medicine. Family members and neighbours had enough experience to provide comfort and care, including using simple herbal remedies. This required some knowledge of plants' healing virtues and basic domestic techniques.



Figure 11.5 Vignette in the frontispiece of *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities ...*, 1691. Printed by W. and F. Wilde, for N. Bodington & J. Blare, London. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. The scene shows a woman using distilling equipment, which was normally deployed to produce therapeutic waters and other drugs.

Hospitals

Any account of healthcare in early modern Europe has to include hospitals. In the past, hospitals were very different from establishments in modern western societies which provide expensive and specialised

treatment to all those who need it. Set up in the Middle Ages by religious orders to give shelter to travellers and pilgrims, hospitals in early modern Europe catered for the poor, providing basic assistance. They were funded by the charity of private citizens and religious orders, though some were run by local authorities. Hospitals were highly visible in the communities they served and wealthy individuals ensured that their donations to hospitals were widely known. In the chapter 'Living in poverty and life on the margins' (Chapter 6) in Book 1 you read that communities felt a duty to help the weakest groups of society: orphans, the very old, those chronically ill and people who had fallen on hard times. Many of the poor were segregated in large hospitals like the Hôpital Général de Salpêtrière in Paris. However, some hospitals acquired a more specialist medical function, effectively working as infirmaries. Take the Hospital of Santo Spirito in Rome (Figure 11.6), an imposing building which could house hundreds of orphans but also dozens of patients who were cared for by members of a religious order, along with physicians and surgeons.

Most European cities had at least one hospital catering for the sick, though some were very small and most were crowded and ill-funded. But they were not simply places where the sick went to die. Medical assistance was based on the principles of humoral medicine: bloodletting, a nutritious diet and purgative drugs. However, a degree of specialisation also started to emerge. After the French pox (what we would now call syphilis) hit Europe in the late fifteenth century, most cities established hospitals which provided those affected by the new disease with specific treatments. Other hospitals specialised in curing wounds; here patients were usually young people caught up in some kind of violence and were treated by surgeons. In the 1550s a London woman was paid by a hospital to treat hernias in children and provide them with trusses (Harkness, 2008, p. 78).



Figure 11.6 'Prospect of the central part of the hospital ward', from Petrus Saulnier, *De capite sacri ordinis Sancti Spiritus dissertatio*, 1649. Published by G. Barbier in Lyon. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. The image shows the main ward of the Hospital of Santo Spirito in Rome. The book in which the image appears reconstructs the history and activities of a religious order that worked in early modern hospitals.

All hospitals placed great emphasis on the spiritual or moral condition of the inmates. One way of understanding illnesses in the early modern period was as punishment for sinful conduct, so repenting one's sins and showing intense piety were regarded as important elements of the healing process. Caring for the soul was considered helpful in recovering bodily health and so hospital life was interspersed with religious ceremonies: a chapel or church was integral to the building. We should not see this religious dimension conflicting with the medical purpose of hospitals, but appreciate how the two overlapped. Consider, for example, hospitals in Catholic countries where, following the Counter-Reformation, female and male religious orders specialising in providing hospital care were founded. Sisters and brothers looked after the spiritual condition of the sick but also took up a range of medical roles, for instance distributing medicines. Both actions were perceived as having a healing function. So hospitals give us a new perspective on medical pluralism: religious people employed in hospitals were healers both because they provided bodily care and because the prayers and devotion they encouraged were regarded as an effective route to recovery.

This takes us to another important source of healing which the sick in Catholic countries would particularly value: the healing power of a saint or the Virgin Mary that was believed to be activated through intense prayer and repentance. It was often sought when all other forms of healing had proved ineffective; these cures were regarded as miraculous. In this survey of medical pluralism it is important to acknowledge that for many early modern people a saint could be a healer on a par with a wise woman or a physician.

By now you will be familiar with the variety of medical practitioners to whom the sick resorted. Provided in streets, shops, households and hospitals, healthcare was in many ways central to the life of communities. Sick people rarely employed just one practitioner: like Lucia in Bologna, they routinely consulted more than one, either in sequence or at the same time. Financial constraints dictated what care patients were able to obtain, and depending on their residence (urban or rural) they would find access to trained practitioners more or less easily. Many relied almost entirely on the advice of family members and friends. But when they could afford it, it was normal for people in

search of a cure to move from a physician to a charlatan to a vicar, or the other way around. Importantly, even the rich and learned could rate an itinerant healer as highly as a physician. You may have realised by now that the concept of ‘medical pluralism’ illustrates historians’ growing interest in reconstructing medical history ‘from below’, that is, from the patients’ perspective.

Online session 11.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 11.1. This should take around 2 hours.

11.2 Good air, bad air

This section of the chapter is delivered to you by a podcast via online session 11.2. It introduces you to some of the tenets of ancient medicine concerning the impact of the environment on health, and shows how these long-lasting principles shaped early modern life.

Online session 11.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 11.2. This should take around 40 minutes.

11.3 The plague

In this section you will examine another aspect of the relationships between health and communities: their collective responses to epidemics.

Approaching diseases

Early modern people were aware that some diseases had distinctive traits: some regularly struck certain locations; others were easily communicated from person to person; still others appeared abruptly with bewildering and frightening symptoms. One of the diseases they feared most was the plague, but the French pox, the ‘English sweat’, the ague (intermittent fevers) and the many conditions that affected children also caused great concern. Deeply upsetting families and communities, all these diseases generated collective anxiety.

Historians have long tried to match past descriptions of illnesses with today’s classification of diseases. This is best encapsulated in the attempts to answer questions like ‘Did King Edward VI [1537–1553, reigned 1547–53] die of tuberculosis or pneumonia?’ Another common exercise has been to consider whether or not the outbreaks of plague that recurred in Europe until the eighteenth century were caused by the bacillus that we now call *Yersinia pestis*. Known as ‘retrospective diagnoses’, these attempts have been recently boosted by palaeopathology, the discipline that examines skeletons and other body parts with increasing sophistication. Results are exciting, and yet this is only one possible approach to past diseases. Demographers engage with archival records to reconstruct the rates of **morbidity** and mortality in communities ranging from large cities to neighbourhoods – and their social consequences. A very productive line of investigation by medical historians has focused on reconstructing the social and cultural meaning of diseases in the past. Early modern people did not think in terms of germs, but had various explanations as to why epidemics struck. They also devised numerous measures to contain their spread. Religion was central to both the explanations and the responses. How did early modern communities respond to the plague? As one historian puts it, ‘the apparently contagious nature of plague brought groups and communities and not just individuals into medical view. Plague was both a public and a private disease. It hit whole communities, as well as being an illness that killed individuals’ (Wear,

2000, p. 280). It is to the public dimension of the plague that we now turn.

Explaining the plague

The plague spread and killed rapidly; its most distinctive symptoms were dark, painful abscesses and a high fever with delirium. Death came in just a few days and entire households could be swept away. We now know that the seventeenth-century plague epidemics had a limited impact on general demographic trends, but for people at the time the experience was terrifying. There were multiple explanations for what caused the plague. This is how one Puritan minister explained it in 1631: ‘When the infection of a sinne is diffused all abroad, farre and neare, the lord is forced to send some publique judgements, thereby as it were with a fire to purge the aire’ (quoted in Wear, 2000, p. 279). To him, spiritual corruption was punished with disease and cleansed with death. People often understood individuals’ illnesses as punishment for their reprehensible behaviour, and epidemics such as the plague were perceived as God’s castigation for collective, public sins.

Most people also saw the plague as the consequence of a series of natural phenomena. This was not in opposition to the religious explanations: natural causes were understood to be the means by which God acted. A common explanation was that the plague was caused by an exceptionally poisonous air, which was in itself the consequence of a variety of causes. People believed that the celestial bodies exercised real influence on life on earth (you will read more on this in Book 3), and so certain alignments of the planets, the passage of comets or the appearance of eclipses were understood to affect the air. Earthquakes could release poisonous vapours from underground and unusual patterns of weather (rainy springs or very hot summers) also generated bad air. In general, blame was placed on any smelly, dense air which, called **miasma**, was seen as heavy with putrefaction. Worryingly, the venom of bad air was imperceptible; and once inhaled, it fatally mixed with the body’s humours. The black abscesses associated with the plague were perceived as the signs of the calamitous spreading of putrefaction in the body. This miasmatic theory, however, coexisted with another explanation which centred on contagion. Plague was so deadly because it was easily communicated by contact with the sick or the objects they had used. Contagion, it has been said, ‘was about space. How far or near one was to a source of contagion could

determine, it was believed, the chances of catching plague' (Wear, 2000, p. 325). You can see the different ways in which plague was a 'public disease': collective sin and air were clearly shared by people, while contagion was about their interactions in the space they occupied.

The plague was portrayed as a universal scourge, but it had gradually become apparent that some groups of people were more prone to it than others: the poor, for example, more than the better-off. How was this explained? One cause was the overcrowded and dirty environment in which the poor lived: filthy houses were hotbeds of bad air. Their diet was also blamed: cheap food was stodgy and difficult to digest and produced putrefaction. However, other factors came into play too.

Exercise 11.6

Read this short extract from William Bullein's *A Dialogue against the Fever Pestilence* (1564). Bullein (c.1515–1576) was a physician who practised in Durham and London.

Consider his representation of the poor.

This should take around 5 minutes.

To what personnes ... doeth the Pestilence come? ... Moste chiefly to them under the place infected, then to sluttishe, beastly people, that keepe their houses and lodynges uncleane ... moste noysome, their laboure and travaile immoderate ... and whereas [where] many people doe dwell on heapes together.

(Quoted in Wear, 2000, p. 283)

Discussion

'Sluttish' and 'beastly' are derogatory expressions which reveal that physician Bullein believed the moral failings of the poor caused disease. They were regarded as responsible for their more frequent illnesses.

In their attempts to make sense of the plague, early modern people relied on environmental and medical explanations as well as on religious and moral ones. Their responses were equally diverse.

Responses to the plague

To avoid the contagion, wealthy individuals followed medical advice and modified their lifestyle, or simply fled from areas of infection. There was, however, a more communal response to the plague. Religion was a powerful resource, and in Catholic communities local churches organised processions that functioned as collective acts of repentance. Snaking across the town or parish, throngs of people begged for saintly intervention and tried to appease God. In Venice, for example, the relics of the first bishop – who was known for his healing powers – were paraded. The stage for civic rituals, streets and squares offered places for sharing fear and hope at times of crisis. In Protestant countries the emphasis was on more frequent prayers, which were perceived as an act of penance to purge a community of its sins.

While nothing could be done to prevent celestial phenomena, local causes of air pollution and contagion could be remedied. Across Europe local and central political authorities oversaw the implementation of practical measures to minimise the spread of the plague. The Italian states were particularly active on this front as permanent health boards with wide-ranging powers were established. They were staffed by men with administrative rather than medical competence, who employed local physicians to report to the boards about daily morbidity and mortality at times of epidemics and to organise the response. A good example is the health board in Tuscany which, from the capital Florence, coordinated a large-scale strategy at the time of the 1630 epidemic, liaising with local officials and physicians. Their correspondence has shed valuable light on life during the plague. In other European countries like Spain and France, these local boards tended to be temporary rather than permanent.

The actions of the health boards were guided by two principles, which were rooted in common understandings of the causes of plague: to isolate the sick from the healthy and to clean the environment. At the first rumours that an epidemic was approaching, a town's gates became the focal point of attention. As shown in Figure 11.7, travellers had to produce health passes demonstrating that they came from safe areas. If they failed to do so, they were turned away or segregated; suspected goods were confiscated or burned. This was called 'quarantine'.

Manning the gates of a large city was a considerable operation: in Rome each one of the 12 gates was to be controlled by a gentleman – who possessed the authority to stop travellers of rank – and by two artisans nominated by the guilds. A rota was established to cover shifts, evidence that the whole city was willing to contribute to the effort (Nussdorfer, 1992, p. 148).

A quarantine had serious economic implications as it could badly upset the trade and commerce on which whole towns depended; banning commerce, for example, led to shortages of food. Health boards and city councils did not declare a quarantine lightly.

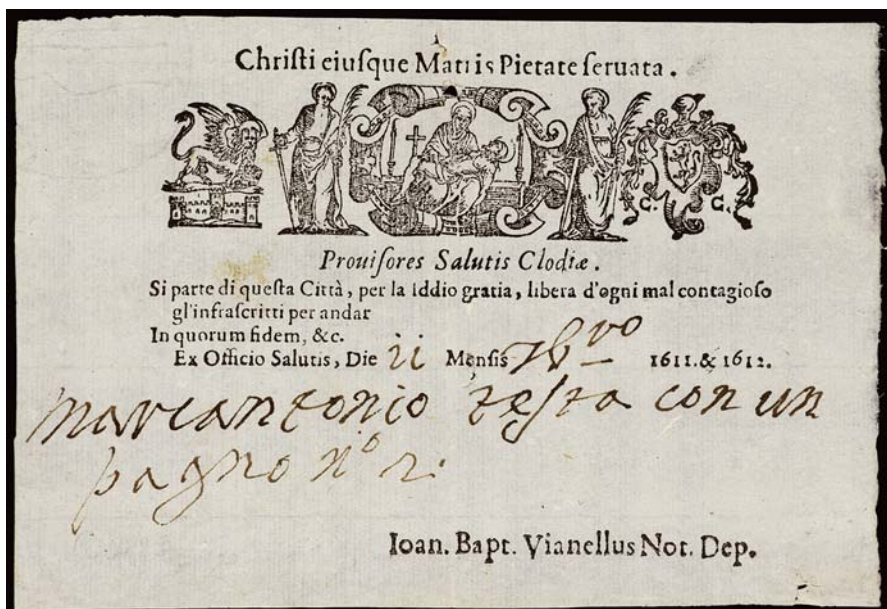


Figure 11.7 A health pass (*fede di sanità*) issued in Chioggia (a town in the Venetian republic), enabling the bearer to pass freely despite there being quarantines and heavy restrictions on travel due to plague, 1611. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. The text reads: 'Be the mercy of Jesus and His Mother respected. The officers of health in Chioggia. From this town free by God's grace of any contagious disease the underwritten have left to go to [a blank space was left here for completion]. Faithfully, from the Office of Health Day [22] Month [Octavus: August] 1611–1612 Marcantonio Zezza with two companions [literally with one [com]panion, number 2]. Ion Bapt Vianellus, notary in charge'. The handwritten notes show shaky literacy on the part of the compiler.

Exercise 11.7

Examine Figure 11.7 and read the translated text in the caption.

Consider the medium as well as the text of this source. What do they reveal about anti-plague policies?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

This form was signed by a trusted authority (a notary) and certified that the bearer came from a safe place. You will have noticed that this is a printed form with spaces left blank to be filled in by hand with individual details. That town councils like that of Chioggia printed these blank forms in advance is evidence of a sophisticated administrative system which allowed officials to respond to the challenges of the plague. The forms could be issued quickly, enabling people to continue their business. Yet you may have also noticed the prominent religious symbols at the top of the document which show that bureaucratic efficiency coexisted with a strong religious element; the council did not miss the opportunity to appease God.

Quarantines were also imposed within towns as the sick were segregated from healthy citizens. Those affected by the disease could be moved into plague hospitals (*lazzeretti*), where they were provided with bedding, food and some nursing. These hospitals were expensive to run and although health boards commanded public money and even imposed extraordinary taxes, they still struggled with limited budgets. The cheaper option was to isolate people in their boarded-up houses or to lock up entire districts. In Rome *lazzeretti* were usually open at the first rumours of plague, yet in 1656 the whole area of Trastevere, mainly inhabited by poor workers, was fenced in.

Boards of health and other authorities also tackled the causes of poisonous air. Measures included removing all sources of pollution, especially animal and human waste. In Seville in Spain, the health commission set up during the 1582 epidemic paid for carriages and mules to collect the rubbish and at the same time distributed scented

herbs in each parish to be burned in public spaces (Bowers, 2013, p. 49). These supposedly purified the air. Infected objects were also burned. Big fires were a characteristic feature of plague-ridden cities.

In his work on the plague in Tuscany, historian Carlo Cipolla has praised the health board for the clear goals and concerted efforts of its policies, which he contrasts with what he sees as popular ignorance shaped by religious beliefs (Cipolla, 1979). However, starting with an influential study by Paul Slack on the plague in England, other historians have considered more critically the policies implemented by the authorities. Slack has drawn attention to the fact that the plague orders mainly targeted the poor, partly because wealthy people could flee infected towns, as shown in Figure 11.8, and partly because the poor were seen as the source of the disorder of which the plague was a manifestation. He has also revealed that the poor challenged some of the more severe restrictions, for example breaking down fences and attending public ceremonies even when these were forbidden. They particularly resented the ban on funeral ceremonies, which were regarded as a social and religious obligation. By putting their behaviour in context, Slack's intention is to understand, not judge it by today's standards. Even more importantly, he maintains that the plague provided the authorities with the opportunity to develop broader policies of confinement and segregation. In Slack's words:

[isolation] appealed because it was consistent with other endeavours which brought greater government interference in everyday life and sought control through order and rule. By the beginning of the seventeenth century plague was recognised as one element in that generalised threat which the rough 'poorer sort' presented ... The effort to control infection was secondary. In adopting plague orders local magistrates were motivated by a less precisely focused but unshakeable conviction that social problems as a whole demanded firm treatment.

(Slack, 1985, p. 307)



Figure 11.8 Scenes in London during the plague of 1665, from a contemporary print. Pepysian Collection, Magdalene College, Cambridge. Photo: Wellcome Library, London, used under a Creative Commons licence: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Historians continue to discuss early modern plague and recent research has opened yet another perspective on the activities of the health boards, making use of new sources. Take the city of Seville, where dozens of petitions survive in which ordinary citizens wrote to the local board of health in the late sixteenth century. They asked for individual exception to the quarantine that the magistrates had imposed as soon as rumours of an approaching epidemic had come to their notice. Historian Kristy Wilson Bowers has concluded that most of the time exemptions were granted. While keen to prevent the plague, the magistrates were also open to negotiations with their fellow citizens

because they knew how disruptive quarantines could be. Bowers argues that this flexible approach by the Seville board should be interpreted as an attempt to find a balance between the different needs of the community (Bowers, 2013). The model of magistrates imposing restrictions on a resistant population that Cipolla has seen in Tuscany does not apply here, though this may be more the result of the different perspectives taken by the two historians and the sources they use rather than real differences in how Florence and Seville coped with the plague.

For a long time scholars have argued that the plague caused the breakdown of social relationships as fear and death brought disorder to the affected communities. Bowers argues that because the plague was a frequent occurrence, towns and communities had to find ways to live with it and maintain the routines of city life. This was a goal shared by magistrates and ordinary citizens. Research by historian Keith Wrightson on the plague in Newcastle supports this view; the town was not shut down and communities tried hard to preserve their financial, social and emotional relationships (Wrightson, 2011).

In 1720 the French city of Marseille was hit by the plague, the last major outbreak of the disease in Europe. Various theories have been put forward to explain the disappearance of the plague, such as suggestions that the quarantines were effective, or that new trade routes interrupted the movement of the pathological agents concerned. The plague's disappearance was undoubtedly significant, though other diseases, for example smallpox, continued to decimate the population and in the eighteenth century attracted much medical and political attention.

Online session 11.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 11.3. This should take around 2 hours.

Conclusion

It is always tempting to try to assess how effective medical interventions were in the past, but this chapter has instead focused on how early modern people responded to disease. Wide-ranging primary sources have given you the opportunity to appreciate the variety of practitioners that the sick and their families habitually consulted; you should also by now be familiar with the expression ‘medical pluralism’ that historians use to describe the early modern provision of care. You have examined this as an economic activity and have explored the different ways in which itinerant healers, physicians, barbers, surgeons, apothecaries and female healers were embedded in the economic and social interactions that made up everyday life. You have also considered the extent to which the provision of care was gendered: although they could not go to university and so no female physician existed until the nineteenth century, women were in fact much sought-after practitioners, both for their knowledge and for their production of remedies.

In a deeply religious society, healthcare was also one of the most important conduits for charity and was offered for free through hospitals. Concern for the poor meant that some cities gave free access to physicians to those in need, and you have seen that women cared for relatives and neighbours. So healthcare was carried out in different places and within different frames of early modern life: it could be a commercial deal, a gesture of compassion, a road to paradise, or a means of controlling the poor. Another reason why it is hard to separate medicine from religion in early modern society is because illnesses were understood as much in religious as in medical terms, as punishment for sinful conduct. So repentance and devotion were, on a par with bloodletting and other interventions, healing practices. This is also apparent in how communities responded to plague: public health measures like the segregation of the sick coexisted with prayers and processions. Examining the responses to the plague has revealed the extent to which political and moral assumptions mixed with medical ones and the widespread awareness of the economic costs of disease. It has also shown the remarkable initiative of communities. Central to historical accounts of early modern society, the picture of life at the time of plague has become more complex in recent works; it was tragic but, in keeping with other aspects of early modern life, it is now

emerging as characterised by action and negotiations and not only by desperation and death.

Overall the provision of healthcare did not change much in the period examined in the module: by and large illnesses continued to be diagnosed and treated according to the tenets of humoral medicine until the end of the eighteenth century. However, as you will read in Book 3, by the mid-eighteenth century broader political and cultural changes started to affect medical knowledge and care provision too.

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Chapter 12 Literacy, learning and the printed word

Gemma Allen

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the complexities of early modern literacy and the difficulties in assessing its growth
- consider the nature and causation of the expansion in early modern education
- appreciate the growth of print in this period and its impact on early modern society
- consider the nature of censorship in this period.

Introduction

In 1500 many communities in early modern Europe would have been largely illiterate. The priest might be the only person in a rural village who could read and write, and sometimes he might have been educated only to a very basic level. The written word was held in awe, accessible only to the very few. That can be hard to grasp today for people in modern societies where literacy is so central to everyday life. Reading and writing in 1500 were restricted activities and a marker of status. This was primarily an oral and visual society.

By 1780 there had been drastic changes. Literacy levels across the continent had risen remarkably and access to formal education had improved for many. Alongside those changes was the rise of the printed word. The invention of the printing press in the 1440s by Johannes Gutenberg (c.1398–1468) meant that by the end of the eighteenth century the early modern world was saturated with printed material. Print had become so ubiquitous that it was used for lining pie dishes or wrapping vegetables and even as toilet paper. The mystique of the written word had been irrevocably shattered.

These changes impacted on early modern European communities in diverse ways, transforming the movement of knowledge and ideas. More people had access to the community of the schoolroom and new communities were formed in the wake of these changes, as we will explore, for instance in the seventeenth-century coffee house. Communities also helped with the acquisition of literacy: books were shared and reading was often a communal activity. Yet we will see that some learned communities were exclusive, for example the academic library, and that the community could also censor the ideas accessible through reading material.

In this chapter you will gain an understanding of what it meant to be literate in early modern society, as well as an appreciation of the difficulties historians face in trying to assess literacy levels. The chapter will also investigate the growth of education and print through historiographical debates; both have been labelled revolutions, the ‘educational revolution’ and the ‘print revolution’, but can these labels be accepted without reservation?

Finally, you will be encouraged to think about what this all means. The growth of literacy, education and print ushered in great change across

the period, but does that change equal ‘progress’? There are dangers in making such assumptions, as this chapter will explore. Throughout the chapter we will think particularly about the module’s theme of knowledge and ideas, but you should also be alert for material that contributes to other module themes, such as that of society and social order, as well as material that reflects on the module topics, including gender and space.

12.1 Literacy

This section explores conceptions of literacy in early modern Europe, before considering how historians estimate changing rates of literacy. It also examines how literacy levels varied according to issues such as gender and social status.

Defining literacy

Literacy can be a complex concept to define. Part of the difficulty is that in English ‘literacy’ means two skills: ‘reading’ and ‘writing’. This distinction is important in considering literacy in historical context. While children today might learn to read at the same time as they learn to write, things were very different in the early modern period. Often reading was taught before writing, so some people could read but could not write. Of those who could read, some could read only words printed in the black-letter type that was found in cheap printed works (see Figure 12.1), while the more proficient would have been able to read other typefaces too, as well as the variety of different handwriting styles that were used in the period (Thomas, 1986, pp. 99–100). Others might be able to write at a basic level, for example they could write their name, but could not go beyond that. For those who enjoyed a higher level of education, literacy meant the ability to read and understand complex texts, often in classical languages, as well as conveying complicated ideas through writing. There was therefore more than one type of literacy in early modern society. We can think about this in relation to multiple types of literacy today, where people often refer to computer skills as ‘digital literacy’, which is seen as a form of literacy different from basic reading and writing.



Figure 12.1 Hornbook, 1630, London. Hornbooks were used across Europe to teach children how to read by first learning the letters of the alphabet; a printed alphabet was pasted onto a wooden board, covered in horn to prevent grubby fingers from getting it dirty. This English hornbook, dating from 1630, is printed in black-letter type. As this was a widely used typeface, it was thought the easiest font for children learning to read. Photo: Folger Shakespeare Library.

Estimating literacy

The definition of literacy in the early modern period is therefore a complex one. The task of estimating how many people were actually literate at the time is even more challenging. If you wanted to work out how many people in early modern Europe were literate, can you think how you might go about it?

Exercise 12.1

You have encountered a lot of different sources while working on this module (including, for example, diaries and letters), but can you think how to use them to estimate literacy levels? There is no right or wrong answer here: just think about what sort of sources you might use. You should think about what sources might be able to tell you about how many people were literate, or what kind of people were literate.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

What answers did you come up with, if any? Perhaps you thought about letters and diaries. Certainly the later in the period we look, the more of these documents survive, which probably tells us something about growing literacy levels. The letters and diaries that do survive were primarily written by those from the higher ranks of society, which informs us about their literacy levels but does not tell us much about the literacy of those lower down the social scale.

Historians have long struggled to estimate levels of literacy in early modern society. Factors such as the growth of schools and the popularity of print suggest that literacy was on the rise, but the question is how to measure that rise. To answer that, historians have used different sources depending on whether they are undertaking **qualitative analysis** (looking at the quality or characteristics of literacy) or **quantitative analysis** (trying to come up with a quantity or statistic regarding literacy levels).

In some areas of Europe, particularly helpful sources survive for qualitative analysis of literacy. In Lutheran areas, registers were kept which recorded literacy levels, as the church authorities wanted to

know about the ability of community members to read key religious texts. Swedish registers called *husförhörslängder* were kept from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Through these registers, it is possible to explore the judgements made by parish priests on the reading abilities of households over long periods of time. But for other countries, historians have needed to be more resourceful. One way of estimating literacy is to look at the type of books people owned, primarily accessed through inventories made of their belongings. However, this approach has its problems. Owning a Bible, for example, doesn't necessarily mean a person could read it; it could have been regarded as a charm, bestowing good luck on a household. Books were also shared around communities, so this approach, while valuable, probably underestimates literacy levels.

One of the most popular ways in which historians have sought to assess literacy levels is to take a quantitative approach by looking at documents that a broad section of communities were made to sign. Why look at signatures? If reading was generally taught before writing, then the signature suggests at least a very basic grasp of literacy; it is argued that if you were unable to write and therefore couldn't sign your name, you would make only a mark on documents, such as a basic cross. One source that has been well plundered in terms of estimating levels of literacy in seventeenth-century England is the Protestation Oath; this was meant to be signed by all adult men in England between 1641 and 1642, to prove their loyalty to the crown and the Church of England, so it has been used to assess male literacy across the country. Marriage contracts are another source that can be used to estimate literacy levels. In Amsterdam, from 1578 onwards couples were required to sign the marriage register, so these registers are a fruitful source of information on Dutch literacy. However, there was no tradition of couples signing the register in early modern Spain or Italy (Houston, 2013, p. 133).

Exercise 12.2

Turn to Reading 12.1, David Cressy, 'The measurement of literacy', 1980, located at the end of the chapter. As you read, consider the following question:

- What does Cressy believe are the advantages of the quantitative analysis of signatures?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Cressy argues that signatures are a clear and universal measure that allows historians to assess literacy levels between different communities and between different types of people over time.

There are problems with this sort of quantitative approach, even if the records can be found on which to assess levels. Data based on signatures most likely underestimates literacy levels, as it captures the literacy only of those who could write rather than those who could read. It also does not help us understand the quality of a person's writing, such as whether they could write fluently or just at a very basic level. Furthermore, what if someone was unable to sign due to ill health or disability, rather than illiteracy, and therefore only made a mark on a document? This approach can never give us more than a broad snapshot of literacy.

Changing rates of literacy

Data from quantitative studies, such as signature analysis, can give some broad outlines regarding changing rates of literacy in the early modern period. Overall, it is possible to say that literacy levels rose through this period; however, this rise was subject to variations, due to gender, geography and social status.

Let us look at some specific evidence. For example, the data from Amsterdam marriage registers suggests that literacy grew between 1680 and 1780; male literacy rose from 70 per cent to 85 per cent in that period, while female literacy rose from 44 per cent to 64 per cent (Van der Woude, 1980, p. 261). Therefore in a very basic sense, despite rising literacy levels, you were still more likely to be literate in Amsterdam if you were male, rather than female. This gender divide is shown by other quantitative studies too; in rural France in the 1740s only one woman in eight could sign her name, compared with one man in every three (Houston, 2013, p. 144).

The statistical evidence also shows that you were more likely to be literate if you lived in a town rather than a rural village; using the data from sources including the Protestation Oath, David Cressy has shown that as few as 6 per cent of the adult male population in some parishes

in the rural county of Westmorland in England were literate in the years 1641–4, compared with as many as 91 per cent of the men in some London parishes (Cressy, 1980, p. 73). Furthermore, you were more likely to be literate if you lived in a Protestant area rather than a Catholic one; the predominantly Protestant Dauphiné community of Saint-Jean-d'Hérans in France boasted 65 per cent literacy among artisans in 1690, compared with only 55 per cent in the Catholic Saint Ismier (Houston, 2013, p. 158). Finally, the statistical evidence suggests you were more likely to be literate if you were rich, rather than poor – as we might expect. For example, between 1530 and 1600 in Durham in the north of England, only 10 per cent of day labourers were literate, whereas for the gentry the figure grew from 70 per cent to universal literacy within the same period (Cressy, 1980, pp. 159, 161). In other words, your location and status in early modern society determined the extent of your literacy.

There are a lot of statistics above, drawn from communities and regions across Europe. You may have noticed that there aren't any broad generalisations about changing literacy rates across the area. That is because the various studies estimating quantitative levels of literacy are based on different sources, so it is very hard to generate any comprehensive statistics for the whole of Europe. What we can gather from the historiography as it currently stands is that different communities in Europe had different literacy rates. Historians have struggled to explain these different rates, but one of the models they have used emphasises 'push' and 'pull' factors in the acquisition of literacy (Johansson, 1981, p. 155). 'Push' factors include literacy campaigns by civil and ecclesiastical authorities. 'Pull' factors include the desire to read in order to fulfil occupational and religious needs. The interaction of 'push' and 'pull' factors within different European countries and within different communities helps to explain the varying rates of literacy acquisition.

Across the whole of Europe, certain factors encouraged the growth of literacy, one of which was commercial needs. There was great economic expansion in the period, as you will learn in Book 3. Literacy increasingly came to have commercial purposes, as reading and writing became useful skills for trade; in his 1747 book *The London Tradesman*, Robert Campbell argues that all trades, from bricklaying to making hoop-petticoats, require basic reading and writing skills and that those skills should be learned by children before they are apprenticed to a trade (Campbell, 1747, p. 19). You will also learn in Book 3 about the

growth of the state in the early modern period, which meant there was an increased need for administrators at all levels of society, for example in the growing governmental bureaucracy, which again encouraged a growth in literacy.

There were two further reasons for the rise in literacy, both of which are explored in detail in this chapter. One was the growth of education in this period, and the other was the growth of print culture. We start by looking at education.

12.2 Learning

One of the locations for education and the acquisition of knowledge in early modern Europe was the school. This section of the chapter explores the growth of schooling, before considering the local community and the home as alternative locations for learning. We will see there was no simple equation between schooling and education in this period.

Types of schooling

The opportunities for schooling varied by community. At the humblest level there were a variety of elementary schools which sought to teach basic literacy; as we have already learned, often reading was taught before writing. Sometimes these schools were free, funded by individual bequests or by the church or state; otherwise they were fee-charging. For most children who were able to enjoy some formal education, the elementary school was the beginning and the end of their educational career. However, boys from the middling sort and above would have been able to attend the Latin or vernacular grammar schools that were spread across early modern Europe in towns and cities. The curriculum of post-elementary schools varied: grammar schools placed great emphasis on the study of Latin, but there were also more commercial schools, where boys would learn vernacular reading, writing and commercial arithmetic, a practical education designed to equip them for their future careers. Charges often applied, although again some schools offered free places. Of those boys who gained post-elementary education, some might attend university. As you will see, the degree to which boys were educated was dependent on their social status and their future occupational vocation. This meant that people would be educated only to the level necessary for their future career: a farmer was thought to need just a basic education, whereas a gentleman, perhaps destined to work in governmental administration, would need at least a grammar-school education.

Girls had more restricted access to formal education than boys. Some attended elementary schools, but there is very little evidence of them being able to attend post-elementary schools before the late seventeenth century. For example, while 26 per cent of boys of school age (5–14 years) attended some form of school in Venice in 1587, less than 1 per cent of girls did so (Grendler, 1989, pp. 43–4). In Catholic

countries, certain religious orders had a particular interest in the education of girls, such as the Ursulines in Italy and France. Some girls in Catholic countries also received an education within convents, where they boarded for that purpose during their youth; most convents in early modern Italy had on average between 7 and 12 girls staying at any one time for their education (Grendler, 1989, p. 98). By the late seventeenth century girls' boarding schools began to be founded across Europe, but the curriculum of these schools was not especially academic, at least until the later eighteenth century (O'Day, 1982, pp. 188–9).

An educational revolution?

Looking in particular at the growth in schooling in England between c.1540 and 1640, the historian Lawrence Stone argued that there was an 'educational revolution'; there were 34 schools open to the laity in 1480, but by 1660 another 410 schools, primarily post-elementary grammar schools, had been established (Stone, 1964, p. 44). Later research bolstered the educational revolution thesis, suggesting that similar expansion occurred across Europe. For instance, the duchy of Württemberg in south-west Germany had 89 schools in 1520, compared with over 400 by 1600 (Scribner, 1986, p. 61). You can see a contemporary reaction to the growth in schooling in Figure 12.2. There was in particular a massive expansion of universities in this period. In Germany new universities were founded in, among other places, Dillingen (1554), Jena (1558), Helmstedt (1569) and Würzburg (1582); Ireland gained its first university in Dublin (1591); Scotland gained a new foundation in Edinburgh (1583) and a new Protestant college in Aberdeen (1593). Existing universities also saw an expansion in student numbers. For example, Cambridge University had 1,267 students in 1564, while less than 60 years later, in 1622, that number had more than doubled to 3,050; similarly, Leipzig University in Germany doubled the number of its students between 1560 and 1620 (Kamen, 2000, pp. 215, 218).



Figure 12.2 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Ass at School*, 1556, pen and ink drawing, 23 x 30 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. This drawing mocks the enthusiasm for formal education in the Netherlands. A donkey is looking in the schoolroom window, attempting to join the lesson. The caption at the very bottom translates as 'Although the ass goes to school in order to learn, if it is an ass, it will not return as a horse'. Photo: Alamy.

We need to be careful, though, that we do not overstate the extent of the educational revolution. First, it is difficult to estimate exactly the numbers attending schools and universities, as accurate attendance registers were either not always kept or have not survived; it is also difficult even to estimate accurately the number of schools in existence at any one time, particularly the number of more informal or short-lived schools. Second, educational growth was not always even across the period. In Spain demand for education was high in the sixteenth century, with the Catholic religious order the Jesuits founding 59 colleges in four provinces; but economic and political change in the seventeenth century led to a fall in educational expansion, with only 30 new colleges coming into existence (Houston, 2013, p. 41). University expansion throughout Europe likewise went into a decline in the later seventeenth century after a period of growth during the century before. This was partly because of falling population levels, but also because the universities were increasingly becoming thought of as places for

elite ‘finishing’, meaning that serious scholars looked elsewhere for their studies, including private academies and tutors (Kamen, 2000, p. 221). Finally, we should not think that this was an educational revolution which encompassed all members of early modern society. Although there were increased opportunities for formal education for all levels of society, you were still more likely to receive a formal education if you were male rather than female, if you lived in an urban rather than rural area and, as you might expect, if you were rich rather than poor.

Explaining the educational revolution

Despite these reservations, there was undoubtedly an expansion in educational provision during our period. The question is why. One reason was religion. For Protestants, literacy was central to faith, as the faithful were expected to be able to read the Bible. Literacy was therefore a means to salvation. This meant both that the church had an impetus to provide education and that the people had an impetus to be able to read. Protestant churches, particularly Lutheran churches, were therefore extremely interested in the provision of literacy. ‘The Scripture’, Luther argued, ‘cannot be understood without the languages and the languages can be learned only in school’ (quoted in Kamen, 2000, p. 209). Yet the educational provision of Catholic countries was also vitalised in response to the Reformation; the Catholic Counter-Reformation led to advances in a range of educational provision. For example, in Italian towns from 1539 the Catholic organisation called the Schools of Christian Doctrine taught religion together with basic reading and writing for an hour or two on Sundays and religious holidays; it offered this basic education to 7,000 boys and 5,750 girls in Milan in 1599 (Grendler, 1989, p. 337). At the same time the Jesuits were providing post-elementary education, teaching 40,000 children in France in 1640, and some 150,000 across the whole of Europe (Parker, 1980, p. 215). However, at their heart the two confessions differed over their approach to literacy. Protestantism stressed the importance of individual Bible-reading to a greater extent than Catholicism, so reading was a vitally important skill for Protestants.

Intellectual developments were also responsible for the growth of education. In the sixteenth century Renaissance humanism was the dominant intellectual trend. The exact meaning of Renaissance humanism is difficult to pin down, but put simply it was a revived

emphasis on the importance of classical learning and knowledge. Renaissance humanism encouraged the study of the classical texts of the ancient world in their original languages; it meant that the study of Latin and Greek in particular was encouraged. Latin had been used throughout the medieval period for official communications of the church and state, but Renaissance humanists sought a return to a ‘pure’ form of classical Latin; they viewed the modifications to the Latin language in the medieval period as ‘corruptions’. Renaissance humanism changed the curriculum of early modern grammar schools and universities through its insistence on the *studia humanitatis*. This was a five-part programme of study that focused on grammar, rhetoric, history, moral philosophy and poetry.

The emphasis on these five subjects in Renaissance humanism was a precursor to the study of the humanities as an academic discipline today. As a student who has chosen to study the humanities, you can probably see the appeal of these subjects. But then they were thought to be essential to forming good citizens who would serve their country well; the level to which you would need to be educated to be a good citizen was thought to be related to occupational vocation. Humanist thinkers, such as the Dutchman Desiderius Erasmus (c.1467–1536), the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives (c.1492–1540) and the Englishman Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), to take three sixteenth-century examples, all wrote tracts that advanced these principles and they did so because they thought that such a curriculum of study would promote virtue, teaching students to serve their country to the public good. These humanist thinkers formed an intellectual community, often called the ‘Republic of Letters’, which meant their ideas about education circulated throughout Europe, through the exchange of letters and the publication of their works. Humanists, however, did not think of educating people beyond their occupational status; they did not perceive that education should raise people above their existing social rank.

Although many of the ideas of Renaissance humanism remained influential throughout the early modern period, new **Enlightenment** ideas regarding education also began to circulate, especially by the eighteenth century, as you will learn in Book 3. While Enlightenment thinkers such as Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) emphasised the ‘improving importance’ of education, the

concept of appropriate education for status was still important. As the philosopher Bernard de Mandeville (1670–1733) wrote in 1723:

Reading, writing and arithmetick are very necessary to those, whose business require such qualifications, but where people's livelihood has no dependence on those arts, they are very pernicious to the poor ... Men who are to remain and end their days in a labourious, tiresome and painful station of life, the sooner they are put upon it at first, the more patiently they'll submit to it for ever after.

(Mandeville, 1723, pp. 328–9)

Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment thinking shared a belief in the socially improving power of education, as appropriate to an individual's status in life.

Online session 12.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 12.1. This should take around 40 minutes.

Learning in the community

We have looked in detail at the provision of schooling. For most people in early modern Europe, however, education was not confined to the schoolroom: learning was largely a lifelong process. The home and the local community were the major sites of learning and the acquisition of knowledge.

Members of the highest levels of society across Europe were often educated at home by private tutors, although this practice declined in the seventeenth century, when such boys became increasingly likely to attend grammar school and university. The few girls who were allowed access to the higher levels of education in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, learning Latin and sometimes even Greek and Hebrew, were also educated at home. This select group was formed of either very high-ranking or even royal women, or the daughters of humanists. In the sixteenth century such highly educated women included the Italian Olympia Morata (1526/7–1555), the Frenchwoman Camille de Morel (1547–after 1611) and in England the daughters of

Sir Thomas More and Sir Anthony Cooke (1505/6–1576); in the seventeenth century the Dutchwoman Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678; see Figure 12.3) was known throughout Europe for her knowledge of classical languages.



Figure 12.3 Jan Lievens, *Portrait of Anna Maria van Schurman*, 1649, oil on canvas, 87 x 69 cm. The National Gallery, London. Primarily educated at home, Anna Maria van Schurman was granted special permission to attend lectures at the University of Utrecht, although she had to listen from behind a screen so that she was concealed from the male students. Photo: The National Gallery, London.

Exercise 12.3

Read the following extract from a text entitled *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* by the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives, originally written in Latin in 1523.

What does Vives say is the purpose of a humanist education for women?

But here peradventure a man would ask, what learning a woman should be set unto, and what she shall study? I have told you: the study of wisdom, the which doth instruct their manners and inform their living, and teacheth them the way of good and holy life. As for eloquence, I have no great care, nor a woman needeth it not, but she needeth goodness and wisdom ... let her learn for herself alone and her young children, or her sisters in our Lord. For it neither becometh a woman to rule a school, nor to live among men, or speak abroad, and shake off her demureness and honesty either all together or a great part.

(Vives, 1529, sigs. E1v–E2r)

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Vives suggests women should study 'wisdom', namely philosophy, so they can lead moral and religious lives; philosophy was part of the *studia humanitatis*, the curriculum extolled by humanists. He says they do not need to study 'eloquence', namely rhetoric, the art of persuasively writing and speaking and another part of the humanist curriculum, as that is not necessary to enhance their morality or piety. Such an education for women will enrich not only their own lives, but those of their children. However, Vives is adamant that women's education should be a private activity and should not be publicly demonstrated.

Despite the limits Vives placed on women's learning, the humanist argument that high-ranking women should be well educated was in some ways revolutionary. Yet the aim in providing these women with a high level of education was very different from that envisaged for their

male counterparts. While men of the middling and upper sorts were meant to use a humanist education to serve the state as politicians and administrators, women of the same social status were meant to use their learning to become virtuous and pious wives and mothers. Recent work has shown how some of these women, such as the English Cooke sisters, were able to use their humanist education to practical effect. For example one of these sisters, Lady Elizabeth Cooke Russell (c.1540–1609), used quotations from classical texts she had read, including Horace's *Epistles* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, in a letter of 1599 when attempting to persuade her nephew Robert Cecil (1563–1612), then secretary of state, of the political threat from one of his rivals; this was a persuasive technique used regularly in writing by highly educated men, revealing Elizabeth's study of rhetoric (Allen, 2013, pp. 96–123). Despite such exceptions, there was still considerable social resistance to educating women to a high level. The humanist argument for the value of elite women's education did not set a pattern that was followed for women more generally.

For those lower down the social scale, both men and women, the home and local community could also be an important location for education. In rural areas, access to formal schooling could be particularly difficult to obtain. For example, Lutheran church reformers in Sweden sought to improve the religious literacy of the people, but the dispersed nature of the largely rural communities made the growth of formal schooling impossible except in some of the more densely populated southern areas of the country; only 10 per cent of rural parishes had a school in 1768 (Barton, 1977, p. 536). From the start of the eighteenth century the Lutheran authorities therefore pushed for parish priests to teach basic literacy, working alongside local communities. This campaign ensured near-universal reading literacy in Sweden by the mid-eighteenth century. The way in which reading was taught to Swedish children in local communities was celebrated by a later bishop in 1785: 'And if certain parents should not be capable of this or should lack time or opportunity [to teach their children to read], there are generally old soldiers, widows, maidservants, cripples or others in every village who can occupy themselves with giving instruction' (quoted in Barton, 1977, p. 539).

Historians have explored the process of education in the community through the personal testimonies of individuals. The readings in Exercise 12.4 are taken from the autobiographies of two shepherds, one English and the other French. Thomas Tryon (1634–1703), the

subject of Reading 12.2, was born in Gloucestershire in England. He wrote his memoirs late in life, after he had become the author of popular advice books; they were published after his death. The extracts in Reading 12.2, taken from his *Some memoirs*, describe Tryon's early education (after which he was put to work spinning and carding wool, before his father, a tiler and plasterer, tried to teach him his own trade) and his work as a shepherd. Valentin Jamerey-Duval (1695–1775), the subject of Reading 12.3, was born a peasant in Tonnerre in northern-central France. He later rose remarkably through society to become the librarian at the court of Lorraine. In Reading 12.3, taken from his *Mémoires*, written between 1733 and 1747, Jamerey-Duval describes how he learned to read while he too was working as a shepherd.

Exercise 12.4

Turn to Reading 12.2, Thomas Tryon, *Some memoirs*, and Reading 12.3, Valentin Jamerey-Duval, *Mémoires*, located at the end of the chapter. As you read these extracts, think about the following questions:

- What was the role of the local community in both Tryon's and Jamerey-Duval's education?
- What were their basic aims in acquiring literacy?
- What was the role of print in their education?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

- Fellow shepherds taught both men basic reading. In Reading 12.2 Tryon reports that he then needed to seek a further teacher in the community, in the form of a lame man who could teach him to write. In Reading 12.3 Jamerey-Duval also sought further assistance from the village, in terms of borrowing their books.
 - Jamerey-Duval's only aim at this point was to be able to read, but Tryon sought first to read, then to write.
 - The printed word was important in the acquisition of literacy for both men. Jamerey-Duval was both inspired and spurred on in his reading by printed books, while Tryon used a printed primer to help him learn how to read.
-

The community was therefore important in the process of literacy acquisition. Moreover, individuals could have access to literacy within the community even if they could not read themselves, as you can see from the 1657 Dutch painting in Figure 12.4: the messenger, identified by the post horn slung round his back, reads out the news in an alehouse to three villagers, who may or may not be personally literate.



Figure 12.4 Ludolf de Jongh, *The Message*, 1657, oil on canvas, 67 x 54 cm. Landesmuseum Mainz, inventory number 800. Photo: © GDKE – Landesmuseum Mainz (Ursula Rudischer).

In the same way, during this period those who could not write could employ scribes or scriveners, so the literacy of an overall community helped determine that of an individual in complex ways. The diary of a seventeenth-century Lancashire grocer's apprentice, Roger Lowe (d.1679), records the money he made from writing letters and legal documents for his illiterate neighbours. Here is an entry Lowe wrote in March 1664:

11. – Friday. Ann Barrow came to towne and moved me to write a letter for her in answer to a love letter from Richard Naylor. I did, and movd her to sett her one [own] name. Mr. Madocke and old Roger Naylor ware in [the] shop and ware very earnest to see [the] letter, but I would not let them.

(Sachse, 1938, p. 53)

Lowe's education allowed Ann Barrow to take part in literate culture, even though she could not write herself. The disadvantage of such a practice was that she needed to trust Lowe not to show her letter to others; the advantage was that she was able to exchange letters with her sweetheart through Lowe's intermediary role, dictating what she wanted to say and just signing her name to the letter Lowe wrote. By drawing on the literacy of figures such as Lowe, the growth of education in early modern Europe could be felt even by those who could not read and write themselves.

12.3 The printed word

Gutenberg's invention of the printing press in the 1440s had a profound impact on literacy in early modern Europe. Before this, books were precious and rare, produced by hand; but by 1780 mass-produced print in a variety of forms was common. This section of the chapter explores the new forms of print culture and considers their impact, before looking in detail at two locations for the consumption of print in early modern Europe.

The print revolution?

With the invention of the printing press, books were produced in different formats. Printers increasingly produced short pieces of print that could be made quickly and cheaply. Collectively referred to by scholars now as 'cheap print', these items included pamphlets, almanacs and cheap, inexpensive books called **chapbooks** (see Figure 12.5). The forms of cheap print produced changed throughout our period. For example, in the sixteenth century and beyond a particularly popular form of cheap print was the broadside ballad: a single, large sheet of paper printed on one side with a ballad and a suggestion as to its tune. By the mid-seventeenth century the newsbook periodical was a bestseller. These forerunners of modern newspapers were small, weekly pamphlets containing information about the latest developments, the earliest of which appeared in Germany in 1605. In the eighteenth century periodical journals became the new vogue; published either daily or several times a week, they specialised in literary and society news and moral comment. In 1711 Joseph Addison (1672–1719) wrote that his intent with *The Spectator*, a new daily publication, was to '[bring] philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses' (Addison, 1711). This type of publication originated in England, with *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, but soon spread throughout Europe; German titles such as *Der Patriot* ('The Patriot') and *Die Matrone* ('The Matron') both found readers in the 1720s.

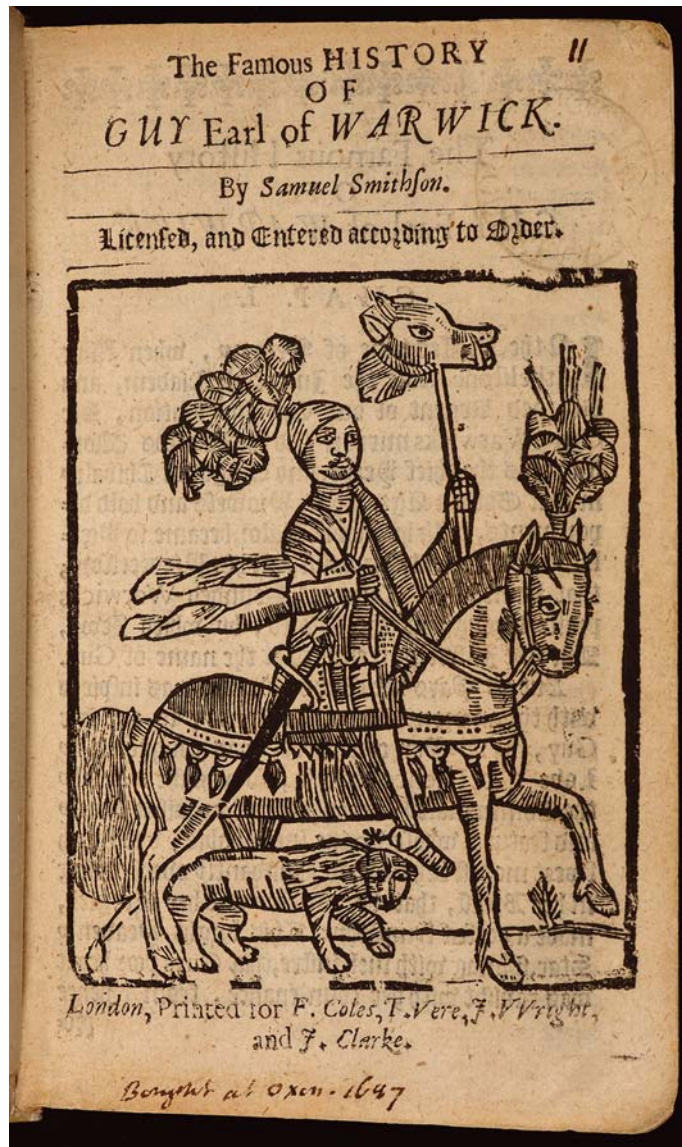


Figure 12.5 Title page, *The Famous History of Guy Earl of Warwick*, 1687. Bodleian Library, Oxford. This is the title page of a 24-page chapbook about the history of this medieval earl, which was popular in seventeenth-century England. Several other chapbooks telling the same history, but by different authors, used the same woodcut image on the front cover. Photo: Bodleian Library.

Through the printing press, people from all walks of life had access to the ideas and knowledge contained in texts, from the rich who could afford expensive books, to those further down the social scale who bought cheap print from pedlars. Often the ideas contained in the bestselling print items were conservative. Some popular chapbooks told standard religious and moral tales, as well as conventional romances; others were collections of jokes or proverbs; still others featured tales of murder and monsters. However, at times of political, religious and social turmoil the printing press could spread new and sometimes radical ideas.

This new mass distribution of texts and the ideas they contained, which were enabled by the printing press, has been labelled a ‘print revolution’.

Exercise 12.5

Now turn to Mark Knights and Angela McShane, ‘From pen to print - a Revolution in Communications?’ in the set book and read pages 192–201. You will notice that pages 196–200 introduce you to the concept of a print revolution. Elizabeth Eisenstein first proposed this idea in 1979 and it has inspired debate among historians ever since.

As you read, think about the following question:

- What are the arguments for a print revolution transforming early modern society?

(In answering this, you will want to identify the case made by Eisenstein.)

Then think about the following question:

- What are the arguments against this idea?

This should take around an hour.

Discussion

- Knights and McShane consider Eisenstein’s argument for a print revolution. Eisenstein claimed that this transformed the circulation of knowledge as it led to an increased standardisation of texts, the diffusion and dissemination of knowledge, and the preservation of texts. Knights and McShane also reveal that there is evidence that print did have a potentially revolutionary impact in spreading ideas during the Reformation and Enlightenment.

- However, there is also a clear case against overstating the impact of the print revolution. For example, it did not replace the word-of-mouth oral culture that already existed in Europe, nor did it remove the importance of handwritten texts; instead, print interacted with both of these to circulate knowledge in new ways. Moreover, the print revolution may have spread knowledge and ideas, but it also spread disinformation. Not all readers trusted what they read in print.

Print versus manuscript?

We can think about how print existed alongside manuscript by looking at the example of early modern recipes. Printed recipe books were increasingly popular from the sixteenth century onwards; they contained cookery recipes, as we might expect, but they were also full of recipes for medicines too. However, manuscript collections of handwritten recipes were also created and added to throughout the early modern period, increasingly written by women as well as by men, and kept within families for generations.

Exercise 12.6

Here we will look at two recipes for dealing with flatulence, more often known as wind. The first (Figure 12.6) is from the manuscript recipe book of Elizabeth Digby, written in the 1650s; Elizabeth was apparently given the recipe for wind by her aunt, Jane Erdeswicks.

The second (Figure 12.7) is from *The Queens Closet Opened* (1659), one of the most popular printed recipe books in seventeenth-century England, supposedly compiled from recipes written by Henrietta Maria (1609–1669), wife of the late King Charles I (1600–1649, reigned 1625–1649).

Figures 12.6 and 12.7 provide images of these recipes in their original form, followed by a transcription of each one. Think about which recipe in which form (print or manuscript) would have been more valuable to an early modern reader suffering from wind, and why that would be.

This should take around 10 minutes.

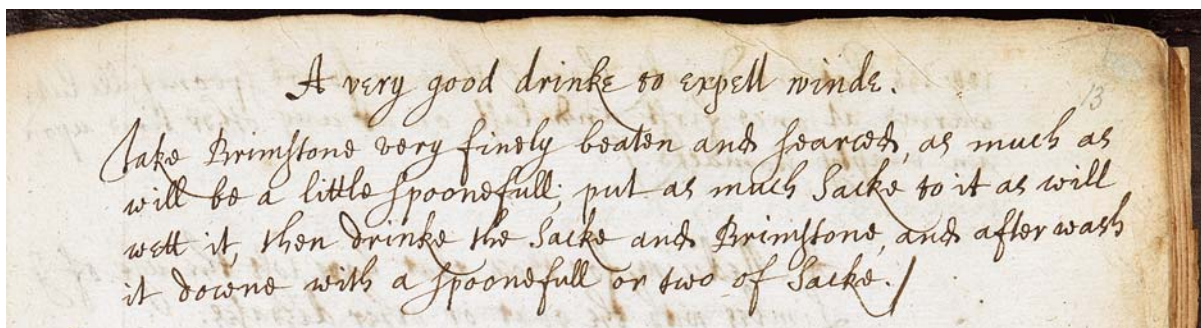


Figure 12.6 Recipe for 'A very good drinke to expell winde', from Elizabeth Digby's manuscript recipe book, 1650. MS Egerton 2197, fo. 13r, British Library. Photo: British Library. The text reads 'A very good drinke to expell winde. Take Brimstone [sulphur] very finely beaten and searced [sifted], as much as will be a little spoonefull; put as much Sacke [fortified wine] to it as will wett it, then drinke the Sacke and Brimstone, and after wash it downe with a spoonefull or two of Sacke.'

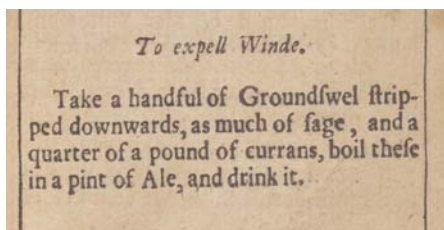


Figure 12.7 Recipe 'To expell Winde', from W. M., *The Queens Closet Opened*, 1668, printed by J. W. for Nath. Brooke. Photo: Cambridge University Library. The text reads: 'To expel Winde. Take a handful of Groundswel [groundsel, a herb] stripped downwards, as much of sage, and a quarter of a pound of curran[t]s, boil these in a pint of Ale, and drink it.'

Discussion

You might think that the printed book would have been more valuable, bestowing an air of authority on the recipe, particularly as it came from a royal source. Alternatively, you might reason that the manuscript recipe would have been the more prized, as the reader would have known it was a tried-and-tested cure, passed down within a family. Both arguments are sound. There was a place for both print and manuscript in early modern Europe, and the growth of print did not mean that handwritten manuscript texts were overshadowed. Manuscript writing signified a personal involvement in the production of a text, and the increasing rise of literacy meant that ever more handwritten texts were produced throughout the period.

Communities and print

We are going to look closely at two spaces in which print was accessed and consumed in early modern Europe: the library and the coffee house.

Case study: The library

An early modern library meant either a building in which books were kept and read, or a personal collection of books; we often use the concept of a 'library' in similar ways today.

In terms of buildings containing books, large private libraries were rare prior to the eighteenth century; where they did exist they belonged primarily to royalty, to people at the highest levels of society, or to religious or academic communities. They were not just silent rooms for reading books; they were also places for scholarly conversation and the exchange of knowledge, as well as for the perusal of artefacts and scientific instruments.

The public lending library as it is known today developed as early as the 1740s; before that, some booksellers had lending services. The first lending library is thought to have been that attached to the shop of the Edinburgh bookseller Andrew Ramsey in 1725–6 (Houston, 2013, p. 210). There were 20 circulating libraries in London by 1760; some of these were very small – simply shops with a counter and storeroom – but others were much larger with more extensive collections. As you will see below, coffee houses were also sites of subscription libraries.

More common throughout our period were the small personal collections of books owned by individuals. Such personal libraries could change over time and it is difficult to reconstruct their contents, especially when books were frequently shared around communities. Historians regularly use inventories, often those made after an individual's death, to determine the extent of their private libraries. In the German town of Kitzingen-am-Main in the seventeenth century, those individuals who left inventories of their books reveal that 20 had five books or fewer, but only two people owned more than 50 books (Weyrauch, cited in Houston, 2013, p. 206). Inventories, however, give only a snapshot of the books individuals perceived as belonging in their library.

Online session 12.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 12.2. This should take around an hour.

Case study: The coffee house

The coffee house was a seventeenth-century invention, the result of changed trade routes that allowed the importing of newly fashionable coffee; where once the tavern would have been a key meeting place for communities, rivalling the church, the coffee house increasingly became a new space in which to meet. The first recorded European coffee house was founded in Venice in 1647 in St Mark's Square; others soon opened in Paris, Marseille, Frankfurt and Vienna. England gained its first coffee house in the 1650s, when one opened in Oxford; these establishments spread swiftly to the capital and then throughout England, Scotland and Ireland – for example, the first coffee house in Dublin was opened in 1664 and that in Edinburgh by 1673 (Pincus, 1995, p. 813). Within cities, the competition for custom rapidly multiplied. There were 551 coffee houses in London by 1739, and increasing numbers in other European cities too: Vienna had 60 coffee houses by 1760 (Darnton, 1989, p. 94; Brewer, 2013, p. 37). These establishments did not just sell coffee and other refreshments, such as tea, chocolate and wine; they became important sites for the consumption of cheap print too. Coffee houses across Europe offered their customers a wide selection of newspapers and pamphlets, and increasingly provided periodical journals as well. Usually charging a penny for admission, English coffee houses were often called 'penny universities' because of the access to cheap print they allowed. Coffee houses were expected to provide newspapers, but the provision of books was organised separately, through subscription to a reading society (Ellis, 2009, pp. 19, 21). Coffee-house libraries in England were at their most popular in the 1740s, just before the advent of lending libraries.

In the painting reproduced in Figure 12.8 not only is there reading material on the tables, but many of the customers seem to be talking. Coffee houses were centres of debate, sparked by the information and ideas in the cheap print read there. Politics, philosophy and science were all discussed in these establishments, and a good amount of gossip went on too. Different tables often became associated with different conversations about news, politics or philosophy, and different coffee houses became known for their different political leanings (Johns, 2006, p. 333).



Figure 12.8 Interior of a London coffee house, c.1705, watercolour on paper. Private collection. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

There has been debate over whether women were able to participate in the print culture of the coffee houses. Older histories suggested that coffee houses were exclusively male, but recently Helen Berry and Steven Pincus have assembled evidence that women often ran English coffee houses and that other high-ranking women were able to visit these establishments on occasion (Berry, 1997, pp. 261–2; Pincus, 1995, pp. 815–16). Nevertheless, women do not seem to have read cheap print and engaged in debate in the coffee houses on a regular basis as men did. However, women undoubtedly were readers of periodical journals, even if they read them within the home. Some journals, such as *The Female Tatler* (which ran from 1709 to 1710) and *The Female Spectator* (1744–6), were written specifically for women, but many

others presupposed female readers, including titles such as *The Gentlemen's Magazine* (founded in 1731).

Online session 12.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 12.3. This should take around 30 minutes.

12.4 Dangers of literacy

Much of the print produced in this period was based around conventional ideas; we have seen, for example, that the popular chapbooks often told very conservative stories about religion, morality and romance. However, some print was deemed more dangerous by the authorities, including certain religious texts, political material and, from the seventeenth century onwards, pornographic books. Mechanisms of censorship developed across Europe in an attempt to suppress these texts. This section considers the nature of early modern censorship.

The specific texts, and the ideas they contained, that were censored varied by governing authority. Catholic countries compiled lists of forbidden books, seeking in particular to prevent the circulation of heretical religious texts, including the works of Protestant authors. In 1559 Pope Paul IV (1476–1559, Pope 1555–9) oversaw the initial production of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, the first Roman list of prohibited books, but other Catholic countries had their own indices which were regularly updated. Protestant countries also developed legislation. In England the Stationers' Company held the **monopoly** over printing from 1557 to 1695, while in Ireland the King's Printer oversaw printing from 1609; in exchange for the lucrative control over all published material, they were required to prevent any unlicensed printing.

Censorship mechanisms were constantly evolving in response to changes in print culture; many of the attempts at censorship in this period were ad hoc and reactionary. However, censorship mechanisms could be effective when there was sufficient governmental will; for example, the Scottish government banned all newspapers in the 1660s and these did not reappear until the 1690s (Houston, 2013, p. 185). But the imposition of censorship was always extremely difficult, given the increasing numbers and forms of print material being produced. In times of political turmoil this task became even more difficult, if not impossible. In England censorship collapsed in 1640 in the run-up to the **English civil wars** and was not re-established until 1649, leading to a staggering explosion of cheap print in particular being published, as part of the propaganda battle of the wars.

Censorship was not just about the blanket restriction of content. It could be about community censorship of certain texts and certain ideas

for particular groups. Throughout the period, educationalists often protested against the subject matter of cheap print. The sixteenth-century Spanish poet Alvar Gómez de Castro (c.1515–1580) argued that the cheap print chivalric chapbooks that found such popularity with readers should be censored: ‘since they are without imagination or learning and it is a waste of time to read them, it is better to prohibit them’ (quoted in Kamen, 2000, p. 228). These fears remained in the eighteenth century, particularly as circulating libraries became popular, giving rise to the idea that books were becoming too accessible, particularly to the lower sorts (Raven, 1996, p. 179). Censorship could also be about reading things in the ‘right’ way, or even self-censorship, meaning that an individual either restricted their own reading material, or hid their readership of certain texts from the wider community. Unifying these different conceptions of censorship is the idea that reading was thought by early modern society to be potentially dangerous, possibly even threatening social order.

Online session 12.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 12.4. This should take around 40 minutes.

12.5 Progress or change?

It may seem that this chapter has been all about growth: the growth of literacy, the growth of education and the growth of print culture. However, we need to be careful that we do not overstate the supposedly positive effects of the growth in these areas, equating change with progress. In some ways this is easy to do, because these are all things that are very important to life in modern societies today. Back in 1931 the historian Herbert Butterfield warned that seeing the past from the viewpoint of the present and looking back on the past in terms of its ‘progress’ towards the future was a ‘Whig interpretation of history’. Butterfield argued that glorifying the past in terms of ‘progress’ towards the world today oversimplifies history (Butterfield, 1931). These are valid warnings when thinking about what you have learned in this chapter. Just because literacy, education and print are important in today’s world we should not overstate their centrality to the past.

The ‘Whig interpretation of history’ means an optimistic account of history that emphasises progress towards liberty and enlightenment. The term was coined with reference to the Whig political party, one of the two main British political parties in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and one that emphasised the power of Parliament.

Let us think about the dangers of ‘Whig history’ in relation to the growth of literacy. By the end of the early modern period, more people were reading and there was more available for them to read. But is this story one of progress, or simply one of change? There was certainly change, but we should not judge past societies according to the hierarchies of the twenty-first century and assume that greater literacy was necessarily and obviously better. Literacy is so nearly universal in modern societies that to be illiterate is perceived as highly problematic. But this was not the case in past societies; we have seen that there were multiple levels of literacy in early modern society, determined by multiple factors. The historian David Cressy has debated in his own work whether the growth of literacy should be interpreted as progress or change, as Readings 12.4 and 12.5 demonstrate.

Exercise 12.7

Turn to Reading 12.4, David Cressy, 'Reading, writing and the margins of literacy', 1980, and Reading 12.5, David Cressy, 'Literacy in context', 1993, located at the end of the chapter.

See if you can summarise Cressy's arguments very simply.

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

In Reading 12.4 Cressy is arguing that literacy was a helpful skill in the early modern period and one which conferred distinct advantages on the possessor. However, Reading 12.5 suggests we should not overstate the growth of literacy as a positive influence on early modern society. Many people were able to fulfil their role in life without literacy and so we should not view these illiterate people as backward.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the changes instigated by the growth of literacy, education and print. By the end of the early modern period, more people could read and had access to the schoolroom and to print, so much so that these changes have sometimes been argued to be revolutionary. However, the chapter has also urged caution in interpreting these changes as supposed ‘revolutions’. For example, it has emphasised the difficulty in quantifying and assessing the extent of change. The techniques used by historians to quantify literacy are imperfect and the expansion of education is equally difficult to assess; attendance records for educational institutions are often problematic sources and the education that occurred beyond school walls is even more difficult to analyse. Likewise, the growth of print may have brought profound changes to the way that knowledge and ideas circulated in early modern society, yet it operated alongside older oral, manuscript or visual traditions that did not die out. Nor was print viewed purely as a liberating force; when it became a vehicle for unsuitable ideas print was censored, either by the authorities or by communities themselves. Finally, this chapter has urged caution in interpreting these changes as progress. Despite the hyperbole of educational reformers and authors at the time, it would be very hard to prove that literacy, learning and print culture were simple forces of progress, making people better and more virtuous members of society. Nevertheless, the chapter has shown that they were forces for change in the early modern period and ones that meant that Europe in 1780 looked very different from Europe in 1500.

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Readings

Reading 12.1 David Cressy, 'The measurement of literacy'

Source: Cressy, D. (1980) *Literacy and the Social Order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 53–54.

[p. 54] The evidence of signatures and marks possesses two major advantages ... First, the test of alphabetic literacy is a direct, authentic and personal indicator of one particular skill. Faced with an autograph signature or mark on a document we do not have to guess or make inferences about its relationship to literacy. The person either did or did not sign his name. Second, this measure of literacy is universal and standard as well as direct. As [the historian Roger] Schofield points out, the evidence of marks and signatures can be used to make comparative judgements between people, between social and economic groups, between regions and between historical periods. No other body of evidence is so valuable to the sociological historian of literacy, or is so susceptible to numerical analysis. Only by a careful study of large numbers of marks and signatures can we resolve whether literacy was widespread and trace its dimensions over society, space and time.

Reading 12.2 Thomas Tryon, *Some Memoirs*

Source: Tryon, T. (1705) *Some Memoirs*, London, pp. 7–8, 13–16.

[p. 8] My Father by Trade being a Tyler and Plaisterer, an honest sober Man of good Reputation; but having many Children, was forc'd to bring them all to work betimes. About Five Years old I was put to School, but being addicted to play, after the Example of my young School-fellows, I scarcely learnt to distinguish my Letters, before I was taken away, to Work for my Living. ... by continually importuning [my father], at last I prevailed, and he bought a small number of Sheep; to the keeping and management whereof, I betook my self with much satisfaction and delight, as well as care. But all this while, tho' now about Thirteen Years Old, I could not Read; then thinking of the vast usefulness of Reading, I bought me a Primer [book for basic instruction in reading], and got now one, then another, to teach me to Spell, and so learn'd to Read imperfectly, my Teachers themselves not being ready Readers: But in a little time, having learn'd to Read

[p. 13]

[p. 14]

competently well, I was desirous to learn to Write, but was at a great loss for a Master, none of my Fellow-Shepherds being able to teach me. At last I bethought my self of a lame young Man who taught some poor People's Children to Read and Write; and having by this time got two Sheep of my own, I applied my self to him, and agreed with him to give him one of my Sheep to teach me to make the Letters, and Joyn them together: But I was as much at a loss for time, being forced to get my Fellow-Shepherds, now and then, to look after my Sheep whilst I went to Learn; and thus in some time I attained to Write well enough for common use, improving my Hand by frequent Practice. [p. 15]

Reading 12.3 Valentin Jamerey-Duval, *Mémoires*

Source: Quoted in translation in Chartier, R. (1989) 'Leisure and sociability: reading aloud in early modern Europe', in Zimmerman, S. and Weissman, R. F. E. (eds), *Urban Life in the Renaissance*, Newark, DE, University of Delaware Press, pp. 114–15.

I engaged my companions in the bucolic [shepherds'] life to teach me to read, which they did willingly, thanks to a few outdoor repasts that I promised them. I embarked on this enterprise through the chance examination of a book of fables, in which the animals, which Aesop introduces in order to instruct those who think reason is theirs alone, were represented in very beautiful copperplate engravings. My vexation at not being able to understand their dialogue without the help of an interpreter made me become irritated at the ignorance in which I was wallowing, so I resolved to do my utmost to dissipate the darkness. My progress in reading was so rapid that in only a few months the actors in the apologue [moral fable] held no surprises for me. I went through all the libraries of the village with extreme avidity. I leafed through all the authors they contained and so, thanks to my memory and to my eclecticism [diverse interests], I found myself capable of recounting the marvelous feats of Richard the Fearless, Robert the Devil, Valentin and Orson, and the four sons of Aimon [four cheap print books] ... I invited the young people who had first taught me, and, mounting a rostrum of grass, I declaimed to them, with the pompousness so characteristic of ignorance, the most beautiful passages from Jean de Paris, Pierre de Provence, and the marvelous Mélusine [three other cheaply available books]. [p. 115]

Reading 12.4 David Cressy, 'Reading, writing and the margins of literacy'

Source: Cressy, D. (1980) *Literacy and the Social Order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 1.

A person who could read was better equipped to prepare for salvation than his illiterate fellow Christians and was more likely, in the view of protestant divines, to lead a life of duty and godliness. ... Practical and intellectual advantages were also at stake. One who could read was more likely to be at ease in a world which was increasingly dominated by written instruments and instructions, documented decisions, correspondence, record-keeping and the printed book. Reading gave one access to information and ideas, diversion and stimulation, controversy and entertainment, which lay beyond the immediate reach of the totally illiterate. A person who could write possessed even more advantages. He could set down his ideas, his accounts, his reports or instructions and communicate them over distance and time. In matters of business and pleasure alike a person who was fully literate could engage in a broader range of affairs and cope better with the complexities of the world than his contemporaries who were unable to read and write.

Reading 12.5 David Cressy, 'Literacy in context'

Source: Cressy, D. (1993) 'Literacy in context: meaning and measurement in early modern England', in Brewer, J. and Porter, R. (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, London, Routledge, p. 306.

In order to proceed historically we must shed the notion that literacy was necessarily as important in the past as it appears to be in the present. As adepts of literacy ourselves, scholars and teachers, high practitioners of a mystery dependent on reading and writing, we naturally associate literacy with ability, facility, capability and perhaps even virtue. ...

I will argue here that literacy was not necessarily as valuable or as enlightening as is often claimed, and that low literacy rates in the early modern period should not be taken as indicators of retardation or deprivation, awaiting rectification by progress. Our quest is not for the history of 'literacy' (reified or deified), but rather the history of society

and culture, which is only incidentally illuminated by understanding the circumstance and incidence of reading and writing.

Chapter 13 The Reformation and local communities

Neil Younger

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the key developments which comprised the European Reformation, and why they took place
- consider the impact of the Reformation on European communities in both Protestant and Catholic areas
- assess some of the ways in which historians have interpreted the reception of the Reformation.

Introduction

As you know, religion was a central part of the lives of early modern people. Christianity shaped their most deeply held personal beliefs and the church formed the focus of their community life too. Yet one of the defining features of the early modern period was the destruction of the unity of the Catholic Church in the process known as the Reformation. In place of one Catholic Church, Europe became divided into a number of different versions of Christianity (often referred to as different confessions). This shift is frequently seen as one of the key ways in which early modern Europe differed from medieval Europe. The early modern period was an age of religious division between Catholicism and the newcomers: first Lutheranism, then Calvinism, and later yet more subdivisions, such as Baptists, Quakers and so on.

These new churches did not attack all of the central tenets of Christianity. Virtually all Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, continued to believe in the **Trinity** and the **incarnation** of Christ, that God created the heavens and the earth and that humans would, after their deaths, spend eternity in either heaven or hell. They were also united in their insistence that the Jewish and Muslim faiths were erroneous.

This should not lead us to underestimate the importance of the changes associated with the Reformation, however. Early modern people believed the rejection of Catholicism and the shift to Protestantism was a matter of profound significance. It was an intensely personal matter for individuals, but it was also a matter for the community as a whole. It was seen as essential that the community should follow one uniform religion. Everyone had to believe in the same faith, the same truth, and people who deviated from the official religion were punished. Therefore when we look at religious changes during the Reformation, we need to look both at individuals' personal decisions to change religion, and at how communities such as towns or whole countries adopted the Reformation. We also need to look at how the Reformation itself changed those communities.

This chapter will focus on the question of why the shift to Protestantism took place so swiftly across much of Europe. Later on, you will also look at what happened in those parts of Europe which remained loyal to Rome. Although these areas rejected the reformers' message, they still experienced considerable change in the early modern period, partly in response to the Protestant Reformation.

13.1 The success of the early Reformation in Germany

Exercise 13.1

Before we explore the success of the Reformation, turn to Beat Kümin and Peter Marshall, 'Church and people at the close of the Middle Ages' in the set book and read pages 91–8. You read this as part of your work on the chapter 'Popular Christianity and personal faith' (Chapter 2) in Book 1, but it will be helpful to refresh your memory about religious life before the Reformation.

After you have read this, answer the following question:

- What verdict does the chapter offer on the state of the Catholic Church at the beginning of our period, in particular the problems of the church?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

The church was a strong, powerful and complex organisation which served the spiritual life of individuals and communities across central and western Europe in many different ways. However, there was a degree of anti-clericalism and criticism of shortcomings and corruption within the church, such as ignorant or greedy clergy. There was also concern that the church was growing *too* wealthy. These concerns were reflected in the ongoing force of various reforming movements, notably in the growth of the Christian humanist movement.

If the heart of the Catholic Church has always been in Rome and its language Latin, the heartland of the Reformation was Germany, or, more broadly (since Switzerland was also a crucial area), the German-speaking lands sprawled across central Europe. Much of this has to do with the extraordinary figure of Martin Luther (1483–1546; see Figure 13.1). Although he was neither the first nor the last to propose major change to religion and the church, historians almost universally date the beginning of the Reformation to Luther's activities.



Figure 13.1 Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Double Portrait of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora*, 1529, oil on panel, 37 x 23 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy. Photo: Bridgeman Images. Images of Luther were immensely popular, making him into an icon of the Reformation. He was often (as here) depicted with his wife, Katharina von Bora, as a demonstration of the Protestant abandonment of priestly celibacy.

Luther was a German friar and priest, who also taught at the University of Wittenberg in Saxony, eastern Germany. On 31 October 1517 he published a document, the famous ‘95 theses’, which criticised indulgences (Figure 13.2). These were documents issued by the church whereby the recipient was guaranteed after death a shorter time in purgatory and a speedier passage to heaven. They were highly desired and individuals were prepared to pay a good deal of money for them, so consequently they had come to represent a significant business for the church. At the same time, however, the spectacle of the church apparently selling access to heaven was distasteful to many.



Figure 13.2 Unknown engraver, *Frederick's Dream*, 1617, woodcut printed on broadsheet, published in Leipzig, Germany. British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum. This image, dating from the centenary of Luther's 95 theses, depicts a prophetic dream that Frederick the Wise, Duke of Saxony, is said to have had. It shows Luther's quill (as a metaphor for his ideas and writings) skewering a lion (representing Pope Leo X) and knocking off the papal tiara, while further quills branch off to represent Luther's followers.

Luther's campaign against indulgences, therefore, was an attack on the complex theology underpinning one specific element of Catholicism: purgatory. It very quickly escalated, however, not least because Luther's criticisms constituted an attack on the Pope's authority. Moreover, as time went on, Luther elaborated his ideas: his position gradually became more radical.

The theological debates of this period can seem very complex, confusing and sometimes perhaps trivial or nit-picking. It can be very difficult to grasp why these changes meant so much to early modern people, but it is important to have some sense of what the issues at stake were.

Let us remind ourselves of the main theological issues.

Exercise 13.2

Look back at the chapter 'Early modern Europe: an introduction' (Chapter 1) in Book 1, where Luther's main ideas are summarised, and then read Henry J. Cohn, 'The long Reformation: Lutheran' in the set book on pages 101–5.

Then, if you have not already done so, note down the key points of Martin Luther's religious arguments.

This should take around 40 minutes.

Discussion

These are the key points I noted:

- Luther saw the Bible as the only definitive source of truth about religion, and therefore rejected the Pope as a source of religious truth.
 - Luther believed that individual Christians could have a direct relationship with God, without needing the church as an essential mediator.
 - Luther reduced the number of sacraments from seven to two (baptism and **Holy Communion**) and redefined the meaning of holy communion, the most important religious ritual.
 - Luther disagreed with Catholic ideas about the means of obtaining salvation: he thought that humans were redeemed by faith alone, not by good works.
 - Luther thought priests did not need to remain celibate and could marry.
 - Luther saw no value in monasticism.
-

All of this added up to a considerable shift in religion, not so much in terms of the central theological beliefs (Luther was by no means setting up a new religion himself) but in many of the day-to-day realities of Catholic life.

For propagating these ideas, Luther was, naturally, attacked by the Catholic Church as a heretic. He was involved in a series of confrontations with the authorities: a meeting with a senior representative of the Pope, Cardinal Cajetan (1469–1534); formal **excommunication**; and finally in 1521 a personal confrontation with the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–1558, reigned 1519–56) himself. All of this would in normal circumstances have led to Luther facing the punishment for a heretic: death. This had been the fate of earlier would-be reformers who had taken a stand against the abuses of the Catholic Church.

The fact that Luther did not meet this fate (as he perhaps expected to do) was down to support from powerful friends. Chief among these was Frederick the Wise (1463–1525), Duke of Saxony, the local ruler in Wittenberg. This political protection was crucial. Despite formal declarations that he was wrong in his beliefs, Luther was able to continue to defy the papal authorities, refusing to accept their judgements. He thereby set himself up as an alternative source of religious truth.

Armed with this protection, Luther and his allies began to reform the church in Wittenberg. From 1522 he started to institute changes to the forms of worship which we can see were the beginnings of a new church. Monasteries in Wittenberg were dissolved. Clerics – including Luther himself – abandoned celibacy and got married. By January 1523 Luther was celebrating communion in which both bread and wine were taken by all, not just by the clergy.

Spreading Luther's message

The ideas of Luther and his supporters began to spread. Just as Luther had convinced many people in Wittenberg of his ideas, so they increasingly became accepted across other parts of Germany and Europe more broadly. They began, in effect, to develop into a movement. Luther's message was disseminated in a variety of ways, aided greatly by the increasing use of the technology of print.

As you have seen in 'Literacy, learning and the printed word' (Chapter 12), printing had been developed in Germany in the 1440s. Luther made extensive use of it. He published a huge number of works on a wide range of topics and addressed to diverse audiences. His most famous work was his translation of the Bible into German (first the New Testament in 1522, then the Old Testament in 1534), allowing his countrymen to access the word of God for themselves. He laid out his theological arguments in Latin, for the benefit of intellectuals, clerics and theologians; the text of the 95 theses was his first bestseller. At the same time, however, he wrote short, lively pamphlets in vernacular German which could be sold quite cheaply, specifically to appeal to a wider audience. Some of these explained Luther's positive theological message; others responded to his critics. Still others sought to win support by criticising corruption in the church, often using humour or mockery, highlighting the faults of clerics, especially the Pope. They drew on common stereotypes such as the fat, lecherous monk, or the lazy, ignorant priest. Often they were adorned with high-quality illustrations, many produced by Lucas Cranach the Elder (c.1472–1553), an artist of European reputation based in Wittenberg.

Exercise 13.3

Look at Figures 13.3 and 13.4, two examples of Lutheran printed propaganda from the early years of the Reformation.

What do you think they show, and what messages do you think they are trying to communicate?

These are complex images utilising symbolism that may well be unfamiliar to you, so don't worry if you find aspects of them baffling.

This should take around 10 minutes.



Figure 13.3 Lucas Cranach the Younger, *The Holy Communion of the Protestants and Ride to Hell of the Catholics*, c.1546, coloured woodcut, 35 x 59 cm. Inv. 1170, Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany. Photo: Joerg P. Anders, Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

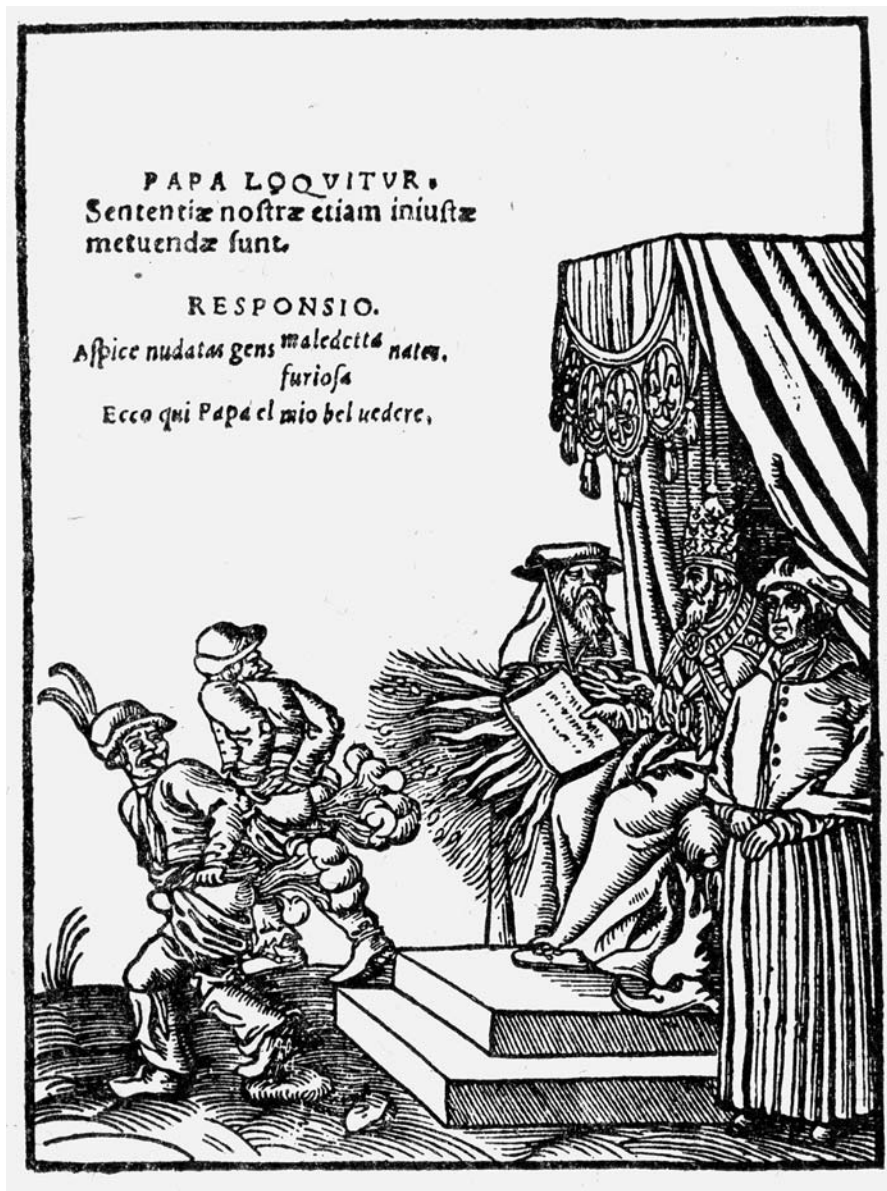


Figure 13.4 Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Hic oscula pedibus papae figuntur* ('Kissing the Pope's feet'), 1545, woodcut. Photo: © INTERFOTO/Alamy Stock Photo.

Discussion

Figure 13.3 represents the more positive and educative side of Lutheran propaganda. It depicts two contrasting scenes of preaching. On the left, the recognisable figure of Luther himself is preaching the word of God to attentive laymen and women. We also see representations of the two

sacraments he accepted: baptism in the centre and holy communion at the bottom left (note that both bread and wine are given to the lay folk). Above Luther is a dove, representing the holy spirit, and Luther's upraised hand points the way to heaven, passing through Christ, represented both as the lamb of God and as a human. All of this contrasts with the scene on the right, of Catholic preaching. A plump monk (with a demon on his shoulder) preaches to other well-dressed clergymen, with images of the collection of wealth prominently placed. Fire and brimstone rain down on the entire scene. This image therefore contains both positive claims about Lutheranism and criticism of the corruption of the Catholic Church.

Figure 13.4 depicts a much cruder scene. You may be able to recognise the figure on the throne: it is the Pope, identifiable by his triple-tiered crown and accompanied by senior Catholic clerics. You may be able to identify that the document he is offering is being greeted by German peasants with a volley of farts. Clearly this image is hardly educational, and it says nothing positive about Lutheranism except that it defies the Pope – it is merely encouraging mockery and disrespect of the papacy.

The ability to reproduce words and pictures in large quantities at affordable prices made an enormous difference to Luther's effectiveness as the leader of a reform movement. The effect of print was in some ways comparable with the effect the internet has had in the early twenty-first century. Luther's publication statistics are impressive by any standards, but for the early sixteenth century they were dizzying: between 1516 and 1546, it has been calculated, his works sold a total of 3.1 million copies, *not including* his translation of the Bible, which itself became a cornerstone of the German language, and also not including pro-Lutheran works by other people (Rublack, 2005, p. 45). Obviously sheer quantity is not everything – not everyone believes everything they read, nor do they even necessarily read what they buy – but the sheer numbers are breathtaking.

Printing was important, therefore, but it was not the only factor in Luther's success. After all, most people in early sixteenth-century Germany were unable to read. Print worked alongside more immediate and lively media. Luther's ideas were publicly debated in disputations – formal, learned religious debates between theologians (Rublack, 2005, p. 37). At the other end of the spectrum, demonstrations such as plays

and processions were also used to ridicule aspects of Catholic worship (Cameron, 2012, pp. 235–6).

One of the most important ways of mobilising the people, however, was through preaching in the vernacular. This was in fact a keynote of Protestantism, a religion which emphasised widespread understanding of religious truth: Protestantism was the religion of the word. Public exposition of Luther's ideas by charismatic preachers played a major role in spreading them to the masses.

Often these preachers were in personal contact with leading reformers. Luther's increasing fame attracted a great many students and supporters to Wittenberg from across Germany and nearby areas such as Poland, Scandinavia and Finland (Rublack, 2005, pp. 42–4). In Wittenberg they spent time with Luther and his colleagues, studying at the university and learning from them. They in turn took Luther's message back to their home towns or elsewhere. A good example is Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558), an ally and student of Luther's who set up Lutheran churches in cities and princely states across northern Germany (Rublack, 2005, pp. 42–3).

This range of media meant that the message of the Reformation was spread throughout Germany and often absorbed very deeply. It was in many ways a triumph for Luther, but it also meant that to some extent he no longer had full control of the movement. One of the ways we can see this is that in 1524–5 there was a series of massive rebellions, known as the Peasants' Wars, centred on south-western Germany. At heart these were motivated by social and economic grievances against landlords, but the rebels seized on aspects of Luther's message such as the hostility to church institutions (which were major landowners) and the inadequacies of the existing church.

Luther strongly condemned the peasants' actions, writing a book entitled *Against the Murderous, Robbing Hordes of Peasants*. He wished to work with, not against, existing political authority: he was a reformer, not a revolutionary. The rebellions were bloodily repressed, but they demonstrated that Luther's movement had the potential to unleash widespread and potentially violent tensions within early modern communities.

13.2 What made people accept the Reformation?

It is clear that many people were interested in the ideas put forward by Luther and other reformers, and quite quickly accepted many of them. This is not the same, however, as accepting every one of Luther's ideas, including his rejection of papal authority and consequently taking the major step of establishing a separate church. Furthermore, this was not purely a matter of personal conscience for individuals: whatever individuals might believe, it was seen as essential that the community moved as one in order to prevent civil dissent. This meant that a great variety of interest groups played a role: clergy, civil authorities, territorial rulers and the mass of the people.

To look at some of these issues more closely, we will focus on how the Reformation unfolded in a single city: Strasbourg. Strasbourg, though now part of France, was then in the Holy Roman Empire and a wholly German city; located in south-western Germany, it was far from Wittenberg. It was large and prosperous place, with a magnificent cathedral (see Figure 13.5), many subsidiary churches and a powerful establishment of clergy, led by the bishop. Like other German cities, it was effectively self-governing, subject only to the distant authority of the emperor. Power was held largely by a wealthy ruling elite, including families of both noble and mercantile origins (Brady, 1978).

Luther's movement began to be picked up in Strasbourg in 1521, with the preaching of the popular cleric Matthäus Zell (1477–1548). His sermons denounced the immorality and corruption of the clerical hierarchy and many existing practices of the church. These included both religious rituals, such as the importance of the mass, and doctrine, such as the existence of purgatory, as well as established institutions, such as tithes paid to the church (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 100–1, 119–21). These sermons were angry and indignant in their tone, placing the preachers on the side of the laity against the corrupt, lazy churchmen. They urged a simpler form of religion, closer to the example of Christ.

As another preacher, Martin Bucer (1491–1551), put it:

All the law and the prophets are based on two commandments: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself ... But how does the love of God come to mean that people should have to build churches, provide for Masses, endow brotherhoods, purchase good works, burn candles, and all sorts of absurdities, and all at great expense?

(Quoted in Abrey, 1985, p. 33)



Figure 13.5 Unknown artist, Strasbourg, 1493, woodcut. Published in Hartmann Schedel, *Die Schedelsche Weltchronik* ('The Nuremberg chronicle'), Nuremberg, Germany. Photo: Cambridge University Library.

This message proved very popular with the burghers of the city: when Zell was forbidden access to a larger preaching venue, local carpenters constructed a portable pulpit for him to preach from (Chrisman, 1967, p. 100). The bishop of Strasbourg began formal proceedings to prevent him preaching, and Zell defended himself in print. Zell had become the hottest topic in the city, with printed arguments on both sides being issued. The city authorities perceived a threat of violence or disorder in the public support for Zell, but they were concerned that if they supported calls for reform, they would face reprisals from the emperor.

In April 1523 the reformers gained an important new voice with the arrival of Bucer in Strasbourg (see Figure 13.6). He was a controversial figure: he had been excommunicated and had married a nun who had left her convent (Cameron, 2012, p. 129). The city authorities initially refused him permission to preach, but also protected him. At about the same time, Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541), a very important church official in the town, sensationally converted to the reforming cause, started preaching and lost his job (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 108–12).

Zell, Bucer and Capito were now an impressive group of preachers able to argue the reforming case, and other preachers joined their cause. By 1524 the inhabitants of city parishes such as St Aurelia were demanding evangelical preaching ministers and rejecting priests who defended the Pope; indeed, the burghers of five parishes wrote a formal petition to the city council requesting this. Many of these parishioners were artisans, servants, gardeners, woolworkers: relatively low-status individuals who nevertheless articulated their concerns forcefully. They started to choose reformers such as Bucer as ministers, in defiance of the clerical hierarchy – and in Bucer's case, despite the fact that he was married (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 113–15, 138–40).

The parishes therefore petitioned the city authorities for support, asking them to take control over the appointment of ministers themselves. In August 1524 the city agreed, thereby side-lining the church authorities: a very significant change. They also set up a town fund for relief of the poor, relieving the church of an important responsibility – a move often taken by civic authorities wishing to supersede clerical charity (Brady, 1978, p. 206). These are all signs of a town government anxious about losing control in the face of a popular movement.

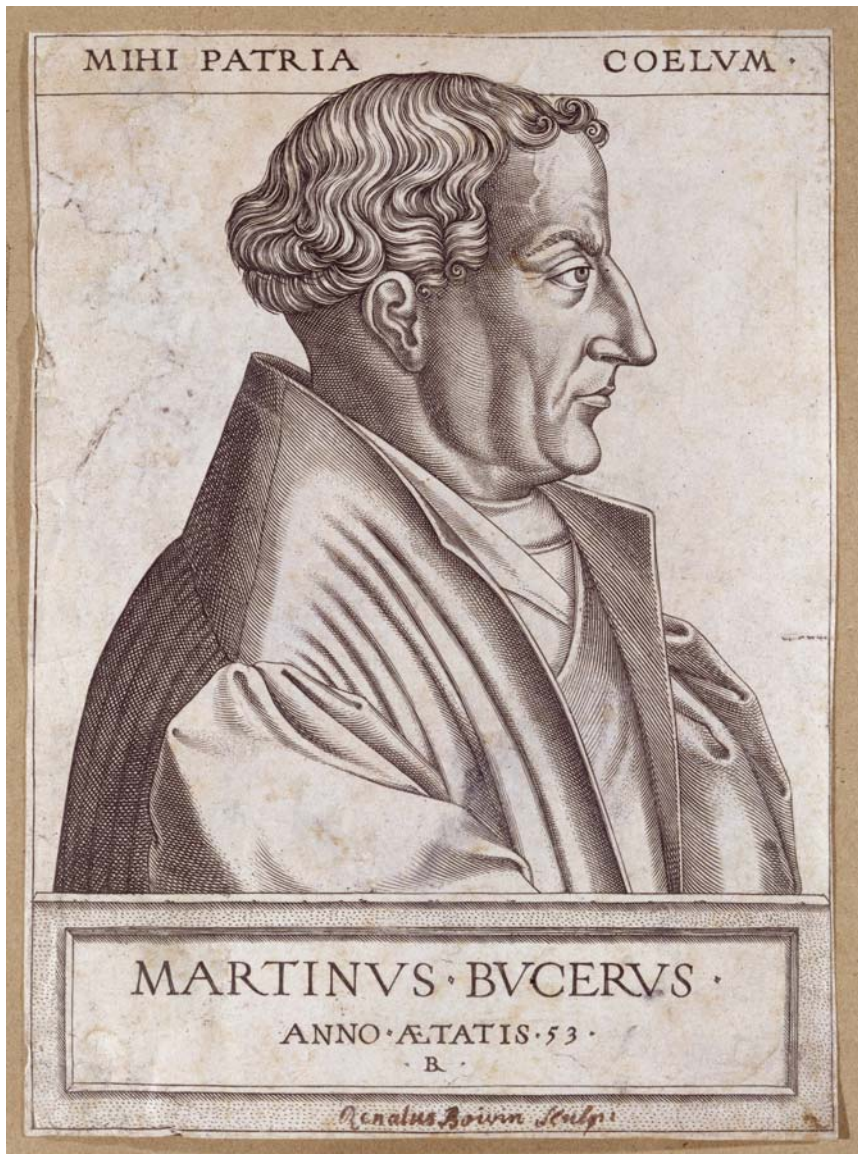


Figure 13.6 René Boyvin, *Portrait of Martin Bucer at the Age of 53*, sixteenth century, engraving. Bibliothèque de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français, Paris. Photo: Bridgeman Images. Bucer was one of the leading figures in the Reformation in Strasbourg, and became a figure of European reputation.

The early months of 1524 saw a variety of other significant developments which add up to a virtual checklist of Lutheran concerns. The pro-reform clergy were increasingly abandoning celibacy and marrying, demonstrating their adherence to Luther's view that the division between clergy and laity was wrong. Again, the popular

pressure and the city authorities' desire to avoid conflict prevented the church authorities from punishing them (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 131–8).

Monasticism also came under attack, with angry crowds of people gathering outside or even invading monasteries and friaries, in some cases looting their supplies. The senior clergy of several important churches packed up their valuables and left the city. In March 1525 several monastic houses were surrendered into the hands of the council. The monks and nuns began new lives, often marrying and abandoning their robes (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 140–7).

There were changes to the forms of worship too: in April 1524 mass was celebrated in German for the first time, giving communion in both kinds to the laity, an action which was quickly imitated elsewhere (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 140–3; Cameron, 2012, p. 219). In March 1525 a delegation of townsmen, again of low status, petitioned the council to abolish altogether celebration of the mass by Catholic priests and to ban images and religious holidays, stating that 'it troubles us because we know what the Word of God is'. Amazingly, the council agreed, stopping the mass in most city churches and replacing it with preaching (Chrisman, 1967, pp. 147–51). The mass was not prohibited entirely until 1529, however: a sign of continuing caution (Abrey, 1985, p. 40).

Taken as a whole, these moves meant that the city had taken most of the essential steps towards adopting Protestantism; even specific criticism of Strasbourg in a letter from the emperor did not halt matters. Over the next months and years, the loose ends were tied up. In the autumn, to prevent disorder, the city council ordered that images and statues be removed from churches and put into storage. It also began paying salaries to the clergy whose appointments it had sanctioned. At Christmas 1524 the council assumed control over all the clergy by insisting they become citizens, thus abolishing the separate status of the clergy (Chrisman, 1967, p. 145).

Exercise 13.4

Look back over this account of the Reformation in Strasbourg. Note down your assessment of the roles played by the following groups and what their motivations were:

- the reformers (Zell, Bucer and others)
- the Catholic clerical hierarchy in Strasbourg

- the city authorities
- ordinary citizens.

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

- The reformers appear to have provided the spark which initiated change in Strasbourg. The preaching of charismatic individuals who were inspired by Luther's challenge to the church laid out possibilities for change which had not been expressed so forcefully before.
 - The clerical hierarchy presents a picture which is dominated by impotent opposition to reform. They had a vested interest in resisting reform, since many of their privileges depended on maintaining the status quo. This said, the reformers were themselves clergy (mostly fairly junior), and some clergy, especially from within the ranks of monks and friars, did voluntarily accept reform.
 - The role of the city authorities was difficult. Above all, they needed to maintain order and civil concord within the town, which might lead them to support a popular movement, but on the other hand the citizens were defying (clerical) authority, and that set a dangerous precedent. The authorities were themselves split between reformers and conservatives, and were also concerned about the reaction from higher powers (such as the emperor and the Pope). Nevertheless, the reformers' insistence on obedience to civil authorities, and their arguments that the city government should have power over both civic and religious concerns, was tempting (Abrey, 1985, pp. 34, 39). As Thomas Brady has written, 'from 1523 to 1524 the regime became willing to go to almost any lengths to bring the popular movement under control' (Brady, 1978, p. 207).
 - It seems clear, however, that it was the ordinary inhabitants of Strasbourg who provided the primary force driving events forward. There was clearly a genuine enthusiasm among the citizens for the changes. Townsmen from both the educated elite and the poorer groups seem to have supported these moves. Undoubtedly some Strasburghers must have been unpersuaded by the changes, but those in favour of reform were sufficiently demonstrative to have their way.
-

Under pressure from the people, therefore, the city authorities implemented reformation. The movement Luther had initiated had proven to be a stunning success, bringing about change with a speed and significance that is very uncommon in history. Knowledge about Luther's ideas was spreading across Germany like wildfire, and proving astonishingly persuasive. As Strasbourg shows, it was not merely the printed matter that was important – the preachers themselves seem to have been of the greatest importance, a reflection of the importance of oral communication in this period that you read about in Chapter 12.

The radicalism of the change, and the extent to which it affected people of all different kinds, was startling. The monks and nuns who left their cloisters, the priests who married, the church officials who lost their positions, the worshippers who heard German instead of Latin in the church – all these felt the impact of reformation. Indeed, the definition of the community itself had changed, since the clergy now became citizens rather than members of a separate order of society.

Strasbourg serves as an example of a process that was going on across much of Germany at this point. Both cities and princely states gradually adopted Lutheran ideas, but they did so on their own terms and in their own time, and they were not completely subject to Luther's authority. His teachings were not universally accepted even within German-speaking lands. In Strasbourg, for example, the leaders of the Reformation did not follow Luther on every point, and debates over exactly what religion should be followed in the city continued for decades (furthermore, after 1681 Strasbourg became part of France and Catholicism was restored as the official religion).

Online session 13.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 13.1. This should take around an hour.

13.3 Resistance and compromise in the English Reformation

The German Reformation spread in the way it did because of the fragmented nature of political authority in that area, where there were many small states with separate rulers, but things were rather different elsewhere. In large kingdoms such as England, Scotland and France, authority was more centralised and communities could not simply choose their own religion. All of these countries saw significant pressure for religious change, but each responded in very different ways. England was the earliest to respond, for reasons quite different from those you have seen at play in German towns.

England did adopt Protestantism but, unlike Germany, there was no ‘spontaneous’ Reformation. Only a few people, mainly in south-east England, adopted Lutheran ideas on their own initiative. These were often intellectuals or those with links to the continent, such as merchants, and they were a tiny minority. There is very little sign that, left to itself, England would have demanded Protestantism.

Instead, the English Reformation came about because of the king’s decisions. By the late 1520s Henry VIII (1491–1547, reigned 1509–47) wished to divorce his wife, Katherine (or, technically, to have their marriage annulled), something which, within Catholicism, only the Pope could sanction. When the Pope refused, Henry followed the example of the Protestant reformers in Germany and rejected the authority of the Pope altogether. He declared himself head of the English church (and got his divorce) in May 1533. This was a ‘top-down’ rather than a ‘bottom-up’ process, quite unlike what had gone on in Germany. The views of the population as a whole were largely irrelevant – the decision was Henry’s alone.

Initially, the change had little impact on ordinary communities. Although the king had replaced the Pope as head of the church, he saw no reason to alter its theology in line with Luther’s ideas, or to make changes to the nature of worship as Strasbourg had done. Henry’s beliefs remained largely traditional. However, a number of

Henry's advisers *did* favour Protestant ideas, and in the following years, under their influence, Henry instituted real changes to the church. This was especially the case after 1535, when he appointed Thomas Cromwell (c.1485–1540) his 'vicegerent in spirituals' – in effect his minister for religion. Under this leadership, significant changes in the nature of English religion and worship were initiated: changes that affected every community in England, Wales and, eventually, Ireland.

The changes that were made to the religious experience of ordinary people were similar to those that happened in Strasbourg. Some of the changes can be regarded as constructive efforts to create a new church. In 1538 ordinary people were permitted to read the Bible in English translation for the first time, to allow them direct access to God's word (see Figure 13.7). Church services were also held in English, and there was increased emphasis on preaching sermons.

Other changes can be seen more as attempts to dismantle aspects of Catholic religion which reformers disapproved of:

- Elements of traditional Catholic worship such as relics of saints and pilgrimages to shrines were discouraged and eventually banned.
- Churches were 'purified' through the removal of images and wall-paintings, the simplifying of clerical dress and the removal of candles ('lights') burned before images of saints.
- Many religious holidays and ceremonies were simplified or banned altogether.
- The clergy were allowed to marry and have families.
- The monasteries were abolished. As we have seen, monks were a prime target of the German reformers and their spiritual functions were widely seen as outdated. Additionally, they possessed a great deal of wealth which the crown could well use.

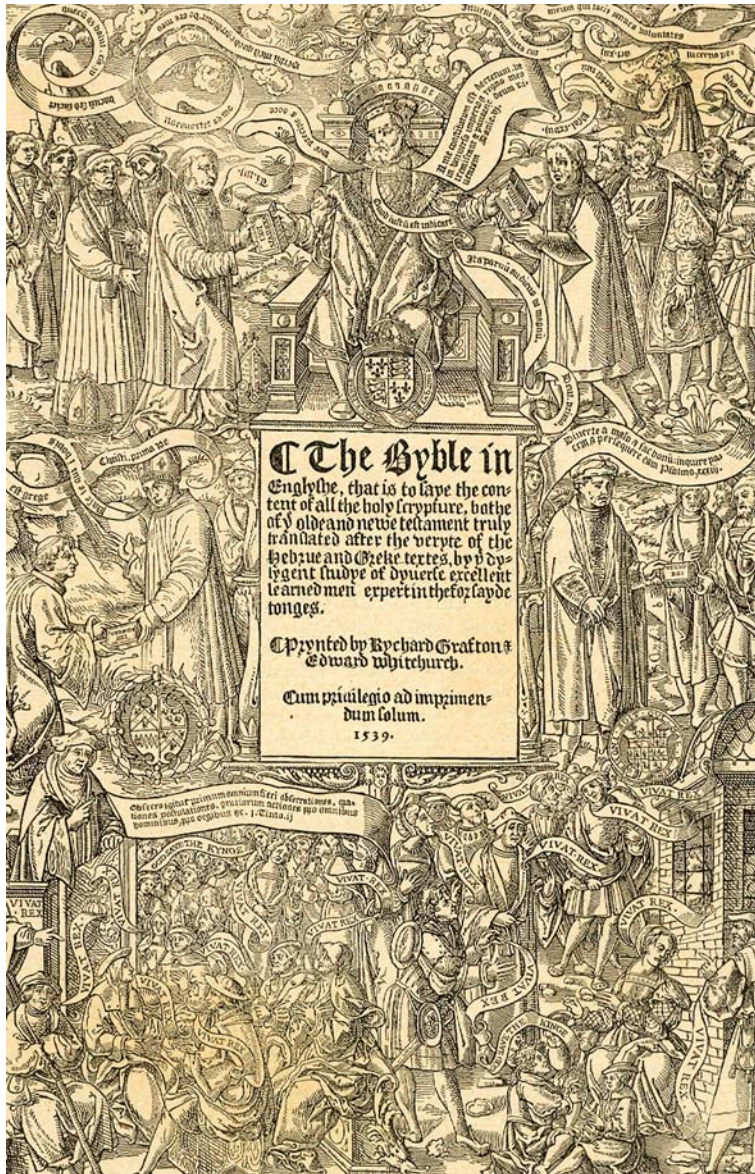


Figure 13.7 Title page of the Great Bible of 1539, also known as Cromwell's Bible. Photo: Universal History Archive/UIG/Bridgeman Images. This famous image of the English-language Bible depicts Henry VIII very prominently, rather dwarfing the image of Christ above him. Henry hands the Bible to the clergy on the left and the laity on the right, while below the people (perhaps surprisingly speaking in Latin) cry out 'Vivat rex' ('long live the king').

These developments of the 1530s began to establish England as a Protestant state, although of course it took much longer for all of these changes to be fully implemented. In recent years, historians have engaged in a debate about the process of Reformation in England and

how popular or unpopular it was. During the centuries after the Reformation, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the English came to see their Protestantism as a crucial element of national identity. It was also a way of separating England from continental Europe, which remained dominated by Catholic powers. This image became so powerful that it is difficult to examine the English Reformation dispassionately. Most historians assumed that the English people welcomed Protestantism as a blessed relief from unpopular aspects of late medieval Catholicism: superstition, worship of saints, subjection to a foreign Pope and so on. Given that this was a top-down rather than a bottom-up Reformation, however, we can ask whether those historians who claimed that the English eagerly adopted Protestantism were right, and whether the Reformation was in fact welcomed by the English people. Should we assume that individuals willingly and immediately changed beliefs which they had held all their lives, about such important matters as the fate of their immortal souls?

There is certainly evidence to suggest that many people resisted. Several prominent figures opposed the change publicly, such as Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), a senior minister of the king and a renowned scholar, John Fisher (c.1469–1535), the much-respected bishop of Rochester, and Elizabeth Barton (c.1506–1534), known as the nun of Kent, a **mystic** with a significant reputation. All of these were executed, and others were silenced through intimidation. An even more obvious demonstration of the attitudes of the populace is provided by the massive rebellion in the north of England known as the Pilgrimage of Grace (1536), which began in Lincolnshire and spread to Yorkshire and the rest of the north. An army of perhaps 40,000 (huge by the standards of the day) assembled behind a banner depicting the five wounds of Christ and confronted the king's representative, Thomas Howard, third Duke of Norfolk (1473–1554), at Doncaster.

Exercise 13.5

Turn to Reading 13.1, 'Extracts from the "Pontefract articles" of the Pilgrims of Grace, December 1536', located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- How would you describe the demands made by the Pilgrims of Grace?

- What issues did they focus on?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

I would describe their demands as wide-ranging and well-informed. They made specific calls for the reversal of many of Henry VIII's religious changes, in particular over the monasteries, which they wanted to see restored. They also highlighted the rights of the church, which they believed Henry had attacked, and requested a return to the sovereignty of the Pope. However, they also implicitly pinpointed the origins of these changes, and demanded they be remedied. We see this in the specific demand that Cromwell and other pro-reform ministers of the crown be removed and punished (often, of course, attacks on the king's ministers were a covert way of criticising the king himself). They also went back to the source of the infection, by citing the reformers whose ideas they wished to be eradicated – not just contemporary figures such as Luther, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560) and Bucer, but also reformers from earlier centuries such as John Wycliff (1331–1384) and Jan Hus (c.1369–1415). Overall, therefore, this was a comprehensive and damning attack on Henry's religious changes.

Despite the size of the rebellion, Henry refused to give ground. His emissary to the rebels, the Duke of Norfolk, promised that their grievances would be addressed, but once they had dispersed, these promises were forgotten about. The leader of the rebellion, Robert Aske (c.1500–1537), naively accepted an invitation to meet Henry at court, and was later executed for treason. Henry's policies continued largely unabated, with, for example, the dissolution of the larger monasteries in 1539.

Online session 13.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 13.2. This should take around 3 hours.

13.4 The impact of the Reformation on communities

The Reformation led to a variety of changes in the day-to-day life of communities. One obvious example of this in Protestant countries was the disappearance of the religious houses (monasteries, nunneries and so on) which had previously dotted the countryside. Linked to this was an important change in the social role of the church. In the Middle Ages the church had had many social responsibilities, such as supporting the poor and providing education. With the seizure of church property, it was no longer able to carry out these roles. Instead, these responsibilities passed into the hands of laymen. In many German towns, the income from church property was placed into a common fund for the poor and distributed by town authorities. In England, as you saw in the chapter ‘Living in poverty and life on the margins’ (Chapter 6) in Book 1, the state eventually implemented a national Poor Law; in Strasbourg and many other cities, there were local poor funds. In the sphere of education, the loss of monasteries as intellectual centres was a significant blow, although some of the money from their dissolution was used to found grammar schools. There were also important changes in the role of the church within the community’s social life. As you have read in the extracts from Eamon Duffy’s work in online session 13.2, some elements of the social life provided by the church disappeared. Again, these may have moved from the religious to the civil sphere.

In light of this, we can say that the church became increasingly focused on its spiritual functions to the exclusion of other considerations. The status of the church also changed. From being one of the most powerful and effective organisations of the Middle Ages, it began a decline, particularly in Protestant countries. Increasingly, laymen took power within the sphere of religion – both princes such as Frederick the Wise and Henry VIII, and also their ministers and laymen at the local level. Alongside this, the church lost much of its material wealth and much of its separate status.

Very often, the outcome for communities was that they became divided or conflicted about which religious path to follow. As you have discovered in your work online, many of the inhabitants of the village of Morebath in Devon seem to have been very unhappy with the course that Henry VIII’s government took, and this often persisted for

many years (Duffy, 2001). Often English people were very nostalgic for the past. A collection of reports of seditious talk from Elizabethan Essex includes the following:

‘The true religion is at Rome ... What manner of religion we have here in England I know not, for the preachers now do preach their own inventions and fantasies, and therefore I will not believe any of them’ (1577).

‘It was never merry in England sithence [since] the scriptures were so commonly preached and talked upon’ (1577).

‘It was a merry world when the service was used in the Latin tongue’ (1581).

(Quoted in Emmison, 1970, pp. 46, 47, 48)

These reflect the way in which religion was added to the range of factors that could disrupt the local peace of the community. As you will see in Book 3, the upshot was very often violent and destructive.

Nevertheless, the parish remained a spiritual reflection of the village community that framed most people’s lives. Much of its community solidarity remained, and indeed this probably helped communities to accept the religious changes that they faced (Marsh, 1998, p. 209).

13.5 Community religious discipline in Scotland

The establishment of Protestantism in Scotland led to the emergence of a particularly intimate form of community interaction. The Scottish Reformation took place later than England's, in 1558–60, the result of a rebellion against the French-dominated government of Marie of Guise (1515–1560), regent for the young Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–1587, reigned 1542–67). This rebellion was based on an alliance between Protestant noblemen and reforming clergy. It shared a great deal with other Reformations: the abolition of monasticism, changes to the theology of holy communion and of the means of access to heaven and so on, and a very strong emphasis on preaching and Bible-reading. Whereas the English church brought in reformed theology but retained an **episcopal** form of church organisation, the Scottish kirk (that is, church) introduced a much more thoroughly Calvinist form of religion within communities, known as **Presbyterianism**.

One of the hallmarks of the Scottish church was the introduction of Calvinist discipline. This was a formal system whereby the leading members of the parish, assembled in 'kirk sessions', regulated the conduct of their fellow parishioners. In this case, therefore, the Reformation had a marked effect on the life of communities.

Exercise 13.6

Turn to Reading 13.2, 'Extracts from the records of the kirk sessions of Perth', 1579–86, located at the end of the chapter.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- What kind of offences were being punished?
- What can you say about the forms of punishment imposed?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- The kirk sessions dealt with moral offences: that is, contraventions of the laws of God rather than those of man. Sexual morality was an important aspect of this; others included blasphemy, drinking and swearing (civil offences such as theft or murder continued to be dealt with by the civil courts).

- The punishments could include monetary fines, but the more striking pronouncements involved public repentance before the congregation during a service. This was intended to be humiliating. The punishment might be carried out on the 'stool of repentance' (see Figure 13.8), or in particular dress, such as linen or sackcloth, or with bare feet or head. Furthermore, some of the offenders were excommunicated, that is barred from receiving holy communion. It is worth noting that in Scotland, unlike many places, both genders received similar punishments for adultery (as in the case of George Low and Margaret Gall).
-



Figure 13.8 A stool of repentance: seventeenth-century bench on which was carved the word 'Repentance'. Holy Trinity Church, South Street, St Andrews. Photo: Peter G. Adamson, StA-HTCh-1. Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Library.

The offences in question were regarded as offences against the moral integrity of the community as a whole, which had to be atoned for. As Alec Ryrie has written, ‘a Church was not merely a collection of individuals. It was the bride of Christ, his chosen and covenanted people, called to holiness. It was also a light to the world – that is, it ought to be demonstrably virtuous’ (Ryrie, 2009, p. 256). Only once offenders had shown themselves to be sorry for their inappropriate behaviour were they fully received back into the religious community of the parish by being permitted to receive communion again (Todd, 2002, pp. 127–82).

The kirk’s focus on making punishment public was a demonstration to the community that the sinner was repentant, but it also demonstrated the community’s desire to apologise to God himself. In the words of Margo Todd, ‘it enacted an understanding of the relationship between the whole human community and the divine that was at its core anxious, even terrified, and ultimately – perhaps desperately – propitiatory’ (Todd, 2002, p. 130); that is, it sought to appease God’s anger.

The Scottish Reformation led, therefore, to a form of community discipline which, while not wholly new, was unprecedentedly intense. As such, it serves as an example of how the Reformation came in many forms, affecting different people and places in numerous different ways.

13.6 Long reformation, Catholic Reformation

Up to now you have focused on the rise of Protestantism in various different places. Yet, as you have seen on the interactive map in your work in online session 13.1, much of Europe rejected Protestantism, or returned to Catholicism after a period of Protestantism. In this section you will look at what was going on in these areas, countries such as Italy, Spain, Austria, much of Germany and most of France, which remained loyal to Rome. These areas did not participate in the ferment of Protestant change, but it would be wrong to assume that there was no change here: there was both renewal and innovation. Historians use various different terms to describe the processes of change which the Catholic religion experienced in this period:

- the *Counter-Reformation* – which emphasises Catholicism's fight against the Protestant Reformation
- the *Catholic Reformation* – which emphasises changes within Catholicism which parallel the Protestant Reformation
- *Catholic renewal* – which perhaps stresses the continuity as well as the changes.

Exercise 13.7

Now turn to Anne Gerritsen, Kevin Gould and Peter Marshall, 'The long Reformation: Catholic' in the set book and read pages 123–32. You read this in your work in Chapter 2 in Book 1 – now take some time and read more closely. (You can skip the section on 'Catholicism goes global' (pages 128–31) if you wish.)

Then answer the following questions:

- What were the main elements of the Catholic Reformation?
- According to this analysis, would you say that the changes identified were more focused on responding to Luther's attacks on Catholicism, or on reforming pre-existing problems within the church?

This should take around 40 minutes.

Discussion

- Traditional Catholic theology was reaffirmed despite Lutheran attacks on important elements of it, for example good works and holy communion. There were also attempts to reform the weaknesses and corruption within the church: both the papacy and the office of bishop were strengthened, and new orders such as the Jesuits were created to help reinforce Catholic doctrine.
 - They did both. Luther's theological objections, as you have seen, were rejected outright. However, the response to problems such as corruption, lack of education and ineffective supervision of the clergy answered problems which had been around long before Luther, and which many Catholics had long agitated for.
-

The church therefore implicitly acknowledged and responded to many of the complaints of reformers: both those, like Luther, who rejected Rome and those, like Desiderius Erasmus (*c.*1467–1536), who remained loyal (as many other Christian humanists did). Considerable effort was made to improve the state of the church and remedy some of its corruptions. The papacy and individual popes themselves acted with a great deal more holiness than had often been the case in past, as when (for instance) Pope Julius II (1443–1513, Pope 1503–13) had personally led an army in battle (MacCulloch, 2003, p. 42). Working with local rulers (most obviously successive kings of Spain), popes successfully sought to reassert and preserve the power of the papacy itself.

Many of these changes had already begun on the basis of local initiatives, but the Council of Trent of 1545–63 formalised them and provided a great deal more momentum for such changes. For example, Trent mandated all dioceses to set up seminaries, so priests would be much better educated and trained. Bishops were now supposed to preach, and to inspect their dioceses more thoroughly. Monasteries were to be reformed.

However, Trent upheld the central theological beliefs which Luther and others criticised. Prayers to saints, the use of Latin, the centrality of the priesthood and the sacraments all remained. The church remained hierarchical, with power emanating from above, from the Pope and down through the bishops he appointed. In effect, this ensured that

Catholicism and Protestantism could not be reconciled: the possibility of compromise had been closed off.

Nevertheless, these developments fostered a new sense of urgency within the Catholic Church. The period of around 1550–1650 saw the church begin to flourish again. The number of Catholic clergy increased greatly; in Chinchon in Spain, for example, there was a clergyman for every 24 inhabitants (Paiva, 2004, p. 293). The new clerics tended to be much better educated, more closely supervised and often more genuinely pious.

This period also saw the creation of new institutions and religious orders specifically to revitalise the Catholic fight for souls, and to engage in active work in the community rather than within an isolated monastic setting. The most famous of these orders was the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuits. Founded by Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) in 1540, the Jesuits' priority was to 'preach and minister, in streets, hospitals, prisons and in foreign lands' (Hsia, 1998, p. 31). Often described as 'the shock troops of the Counter-Reformation', many Jesuits became missionaries abroad, as far afield as China; as you saw in Chapter 12, they also founded and ran schools and universities, often educating the elites.

Exercise. 13.8

Turn to Reading 13.3, 'Ignatius Loyola to St Peter Canisius, August 1554', located at the end of the chapter. This is an extract from a letter of the Counter-Reformation pioneer, Ignatius Loyola.

After you have read this, answer the following questions:

- How did the practical measures Loyola recommended respond to the challenge of the reformers?
- What do you make of the tone of Loyola's letter?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

- Loyola recommended using many of the same tools the reformers had employed: reform of institutions, print, preaching, education and argument. He also sought to remedy some of the problems in the church which the reformers (as well as many Catholics) had complained about, such as 'the ignorance of the Catholic clergy'.
 - Loyola's tone strikes me as practical and determined. He clearly believed that much could be done relatively quickly and easily, and he seemed to accept some of the criticisms of the lack of education and corruption of the church. He was also combative, however, referring to Lutherans as 'heretics' and their ideas as infections.
-

Loyola's letter exemplifies the renewed sense of determination and purpose which gradually returned to the Catholic Church. In contrast to the Protestant focus on preaching and the power of the word, along with insistence on austerity within the church, Catholics placed renewed emphasis on the sensual element of worship: processions, clerical robes, rich church music, artworks, the use of incense. Partly because the Catholic Church mostly retained the lands and wealth which were lost in Protestant areas, it could improve the provision of churches and their decoration. In these churches, artworks were used to stimulate devotion and religious feeling in the people, and the cult of saints (especially that of the Virgin Mary) flourished. A classic example of this tendency can be seen in Figure 13.9.

For communities, this tended to mean a deepening and intensifying of religious life. There were improvements in education and the knowledge of the laity, such as the use of catechisms to teach children the fundamentals of Catholic religion. This was encouraged by the spiritual examples of modern-day saints such as St Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), St John of the Cross (1542–1591) and others.



Figure 13.9 Chiesa del Gesù (Church of Jesus), Rome, Italy. Photo: © Vito Arcomano/Alamy Stock Photo. The Gesù in Rome, built 1568–80, was the mother church of the Jesuits.

One distinctive form of post-Reformation Catholic religious activity was the rural mission, in which clergy – often charismatic and

theatrical preachers – travelled to remote or ill-served regions, hearing confession and celebrating communion, bringing education and inspiration to rural areas (Hsia, 1998, pp. 200–1). Another important form of Catholic religious activity was the confraternity. While the clergy remained central to Catholic religion, institutions like confraternities allowed ordinary believers to play important roles within the church too, somewhat echoing the Protestant ‘priesthood of all believers’ (Ditchfield, 2015, p. 181). The confraternities stressed good works, which, as you have seen, Catholics continued to believe were essential for salvation; in this sense the confraternities distinguished themselves from Protestantism.

Look at Figure 13.10, painted by Gentile Bellini (c.1429–1507) in 1496. Dating from just before the beginning of the Reformation, it illustrates many aspects of the church which Protestants reacted against, but which were retained and reasserted by Catholics in the period following the Council of Trent. The image shows the colourful, sensually appealing style of worship which Catholics continued to favour. Processions were much reduced in Protestant churches, despite their visual appeal and the excitement they brought to observers. The veneration of saints and the relics of saints, which many confraternities focused on, was also eliminated in Protestant areas.



Figure 13.10 Gentile Bellini, *Procession in St Mark's Square*, 1496, oil on canvas, 367 x 745 cm. Galleria dell' Accademia, Venice, Italy. Photo: Bridgeman Images.

Assessing the success of the Catholic Reformation

Developments within the Catholic Church certainly suggest that many of the reformers' criticisms of the church's shortcomings were accepted as valid. Catholicism clearly sought to 'clean up its act' in terms of the quality and morality of the clergy. More importantly, though, there was a strong recognition of the need to carry out the basic work of the church more effectively: to provide religious teaching and to administer the sacraments to the mass of ordinary Christians. The provision of a well-educated clergy was a crucial element of this. Overall, the Catholic Reformation strengthened the church within those areas that remained loyal to Rome.

This was a very slow process. Many of the decrees of Trent were not fully carried out for decades or even centuries. Nevertheless, it had considerable successes in Europe. After about 1560 the church was no longer on the back foot, and it ceased to lose further territory to the Protestants. It retained Poland for Catholicism and reclaimed Bohemia (the modern Czech Republic) and parts of Germany, for example. Perhaps its most dazzling successes, however, were beyond Europe, with the spread of Catholicism to the New World and the Far East, in partnership with the spread of the Spanish empire.

Conclusion

Whether individuals and communities welcomed it or resisted it, the Reformation and its implications changed their lives greatly. In this chapter you have looked at some of the social and economic effects of the Reformation, which were often very troubling for those involved. The overall outcome of the Reformation could be said to have been just as traumatic for the continent as a whole. Europe itself became divided between a Catholic south and a Protestant north, no longer the single Christendom it had been during the Middle Ages. The Protestants themselves, furthermore, were far from united: lacking a single overall authority equivalent to the Pope, they split into multiple confessions, which were frequently in conflict. Individual European countries became divided in religion. Very often this led to tensions within communities, or even war. Religion played an important role in wars and civil wars in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, England, Scotland and Ireland (although there were usually other factors involved). Many countries ended up with religious minorities which often faced persecution of one kind or another within their own local communities. Even in supposedly tolerant England, Catholics were persecuted, shut out of many professions and public life; as late as 1829, Catholics could not become MPs. The very idea of Europe and European people as a single community of faith was lost.

At the same time, individuals' experiences of religion often became much more intense. As you read in Chapter 2, there is a good argument for saying that most medieval people were Christian in only a fairly nominal sense, understanding little of the religion which they followed. In the early modern period, various developments helped to change this: the Reformation (and the Catholic response to it) was one, but greater prosperity, urbanisation and the growth of printing, literacy and education were others. In some senses, Europe became increasingly 'Christianised', with a growing intensity of belief and faith among the masses. But change is always traumatic – even setting aside those who died or faced violence over religion, many people lost a great deal, whether this entailed losing financially, losing their position or their job or their home, or simply losing what was familiar.

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Readings

Reading 13.1 Extracts from the 'Pontefract articles' of the Pilgrims of Grace, December 1536

Source: Hoyle, R. W. (2001) *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 460–2.

The first touching our faith, to have the heresies of Luther, Wycliffe, Hus, Melanchthon, Oecolampadius, Bucer [and others] to be annulled and destroyed.

...

The second to have the supreme head of the church touching *cure animarum* [cure of souls] to be reserved unto the see of Rome as before it was accustomed to be, and to have the consecrations of the bishops [*to be restored to the clergy*] from him without any first fruits or pension to him to be paid out of this realm or else a pension reasonable for the outward defence of our faith.

[p. 461]

Item, we humbly beseech our most dread sovereign lord that the Lady Mary may be made legitimate and the former statutes therein annulled

...

Item, to have the abbeyes suppressed to be restored unto their houses, lands and goods.

...

Item, to have the Friars observants restored unto their houses again.

Item, to have the heretics, bishops, and temporal [men] and their sect, to have condign punishment by fire or such other, or else to try their quarrel with us and our part takers in battle.

Item, to have the Lord Cromwell, the Lord Chancellor, and Sir Richard Rich, knight, to have condign punishment as the subvertors of the good laws of this realm and maintainers of the false sect of those heretics and the first inventors and bringers in of them.

...

[p. 462]

Item, the privileges and rights of the church to be confirmed by act of parliament...

Item, the liberties of the church to have their old customs as the county palatine at Durham, Beverley, Ripon, St Peter of York, and such other by act of parliament.

Reading 13.2 Extracts from the records of the kirk sessions of Perth

Source: Todd, M. (ed.) (2012) *The Perth Kirk Session Books 1577–1590*, Scottish History Society, Sixth Series, vol. 2, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, pp. 131, 163, 166, 322, 341.

[The spelling in this reading has been modernised for clarity]

8 September 1579: John Landray submits himself to the discipline of the kirk for the perturbation of the kirk the time of the ministration of the sacrament of baptism, for which cause the assembly ordains him to pass about the cross in linen clothes barefoot and bareheaded on Thursday and Sunday next, and thereafter that he come to the public place of repentance the time of the sermon, there publicly to confess his offence ...

[p. 163]

5 September 1580: The assembly ordains Margret Ruthven, excommunicated adultress, to be received upon Thursday next [back in] to the kirk of God, in respect she has performed her whole injunction [punishment] from assembly to the assembly and appeared to her repentance in sackcloth 6 days.

[p. 166]

October 1580: There appeared Elspet Carvor and confessed she had company with James Walcar in eating, drinking, and lying within a roof with him, since the act was made. The assembly ... ordains her to stand three several Sundays in the stool of repentance, in sackcloth and to stand at kirk door from second bell to the third.

13 September 1585: Forasmuch as sundry [people] resorted in time of sermon to taverns and alehouses and came not to the kirk as became Christians, therefore it is ordained that each taverner and ale seller that sells wine or ale in time of sermon pay 20 shillings and also all that resorts to taverns or ale houses and are there apprehended shall pay 10 shillings and that this penalty be taken from the contraveners of this act as often as they are culpable thereof. [p. 322]

11 April 1586: The whole assembly convicts George Low in the penalty of ten pounds for his fornication committed by him with Margaret Gall. [p. 341]

...

The whole assembly convicts Margaret Gall in the penalty of ten pounds for not fulfilling the band of matrimony.

Reading 13.3 Ignatius Loyola to St Peter Canisius, August 1554

Source: Quoted in Jones, M. D. W. (1995) *The Counter Reformation: Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 146.

Our Society should make use of the following means to put a stop and apply a remedy to the evils which have come upon the Church ... exerting itself to the utmost of its powers to preserve what is still sound and to restore what is fallen sick of the plague of heresy ... [Regarding] the sound theology which is taught in the universities ... it would be good to make a summary to deal with topics that are important but not controversial ... It should solidly prove dogmas with good arguments from Scripture, tradition, the councils, and the doctors, and refute the contrary teaching. It would not require much time to teach such a theology, since it would not go very deeply into other matters. In this way, theologians could be produced in a short time ... Another excellent means for helping the Church in this trial would be to multiply the colleges and schools of the Society [of Jesus – i.e. the Jesuits] ... The better among our students could be sent to teach Christian doctrine on Sundays and feast days. Thus by the correct doctrine, they would be giving example of a good life, and by removing every appearance of greed they will be able to refute the

strongest argument of the heretics – a bad life, namely, the ignorance of the Catholic clergy. The heretics write a large number of booklets and pamphlets, by means of which they aim at taking away all authority from the Catholics ... It would seem expedient, therefore, that Ours also write answers in pamphlet form, short and well written, so that they can be produced without delay and brought by many ... We should use the same diligence in healing the heretics that the heretics are using in infecting the people.

Chapter 14 Gender

Gemma Allen

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the workings of gender, patriarchy and honour in historical context
- consider the complexities of early modern masculinity and femininity and how they are reflected in different types of source material
- understand the role of the community in forming and policing early modern gender roles
- consider the issue of continuity and change of gender roles.

Introduction

What would you say if I asked you to describe your perfect man or woman? Beyond the physical, what sort of characteristics would they have? Would they be confident, or retiring? Should they be financially independent, or is their economic status unimportant? And what about sex? Does it matter if they have had a lot of sexual partners? You might think all your answers are simply personal preference, but it is very likely that the society and culture you live in has informed your choices and has provided you with certain ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman in the twenty-first century. That is because societies create gendered ideas about what is considered womanly or manly. Some of these gendered ideas have changed a lot since the early modern period, but some look remarkably similar, as you will discover in this chapter. We will explore the dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity in early modern society and ask how and where people learned these ideas. We will consider how gender ideas were enforced and whether they were ever challenged. Finally, we will look at whether gender ideas changed at all during the early modern period. Was there ever a radical rethinking of what it meant to be a man or a woman at this time?

14.1 What is gender and what is gender history?

Gender is the idea that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed concepts, rather than being biologically fixed. Gender is therefore different from sex; a person's sex is a biological category ascribed by their body and indicated by bodily markers such as their genitalia. Instead, gender is something constructed by the community around the person; it is the attitudes and behaviours that a society or culture associate with a biological sex.

Instead of men always being masculine and women always being feminine, men can adopt what are perceived as feminine traits and women can adopt what are seen as masculine ones, both in the early modern period and today. This means that ideas about gender are unstable. They can change over time and be different in different locations, meaning they are historically and culturally specific. It also means that there could be more than one idea of what it meant to be masculine or feminine at certain points in our period, giving rise to competing versions of masculinity and femininity (see Figure 14.1).

Gender is a social construct, meaning it is something that is constructed in communities; it is not something that individuals inherently possess. Gender is therefore a key concept for understanding one of the module's themes, that of social status in early modern Europe. In Book 1 you learned that social rank, from the peasantry to the nobility, was a key hierarchy of the period, but this chapter will suggest that gender was another hierarchy that distinguished people within communities. In other words, the ranking of an individual within their community was dependent on their place in a variety of hierarchies, of which gender was one. Gender hierarchies are shown not only in the actual relationships between men and women, but also in the language used to describe behaviour and characteristics.



Figure 14.1 Samuel Hieronymus Grimm, *What is this my Son Tom*, 1774, hand-coloured print, 35 x 25 cm. Published by Robert Sayer and John Bennett, London. This satirical print shows an encounter between two types of masculinity: the country squire, a symbol of rustic English manliness, mocks his son, back from London, who has absorbed the supposedly effeminate European fashion of a large wig and tiny hat. Photo: Courtesy of The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, call No. 774.06.24.01+.

Exercise 14.1

Consider the gendered language we use today. Can you think of examples when certain behaviours are labelled as particularly masculine or feminine?

Don't worry if you can't think of any examples; ideas may occur to you as you study the material in the rest of the chapter.

This should take around 5 minutes.

Discussion

Perhaps you thought about a situation where a man is labelled as being 'such a girl' for his behaviour, or is even told to 'man up'. Such language draws on the gendered ideas current today. The same thing happened in early modern Europe using contemporary gender concepts.

The word 'gender' is a modern term; gender history developed as a field of study only in the 1980s, in response to scholarship on women's history that flourished in the 1970s. Women's history focused on uncovering women's activities in the past, challenging the neglect of women's historical experiences. Gender history is instead about how masculinity and femininity were constructed in the past. The groundbreaking gender historian Joan Scott explains the difference between women's or men's history, and gender history, as follows:

The story is no longer about the things that have happened to women and men and how they have reacted to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed.

(Scott, 1999, p. 6)

Communities in early modern Europe held certain ideas about gender, but they would not have used that word. Instead, they would probably have been more likely to use terms like 'manhood' and 'womanhood' to discuss gendered issues, so we will often use these words in this chapter.

A term with which early modern communities would have been familiar, especially from the seventeenth century onwards, is patriarchy.

You might already have some ideas about what patriarchy means, as twentieth-century feminists used the term in discussing female social oppression and domination by men; they defined patriarchy as a social system that favours men over women. However, in the early modern period ‘patriarchy’ was taken to mean the social system whereby fathers (the patriarchs) should rule in the household. This is the definition used in this chapter as in many ways it is a more helpful meaning to keep in mind, for it suggests that some men – those who were fathers and householders – had authority over those in their household, including their wives, as well as children and servants, male and female. Not all men in early modern society were patriarchs and not all women were under patriarchal control. Historians are often drawn to binary divisions, in this case the idea that all women were subordinate and all men authoritative, but we need to go beyond this simple equation to look at the complex workings of gender in early modern society.

The interpretation of gender ideas depends on the type of evidence studied. Some of the evidence in this chapter is from texts telling people how they should behave, but other evidence tells you how people actually behaved. Therefore we will find that different types of evidence reveal different aspects of early modern gender. Throughout, the chapter suggests that gender was a flexible code in early modern society, one which individuals embraced, negotiated and resisted within their communities. This makes it very difficult to make blanket statements about gender relations in the period. You might be worried at this point that the week’s work is going to be very complicated, but don’t panic: the chapter will provide you with the tools of the gender historian and take you step by step through the source material and debates that follow.

14.2 Prescription: gender by the book

Historians have often sought to study gender by looking at how people learned to be masculine and feminine. One way they learned these ideas was through prescriptive texts; these were sources that told people how to behave as men and women and thus acted as authorities on idealised gender relations.

Exercise 14.2

Turn to Bernard Capp, 'Gender and family' in the set book and read pages 37–8.

Then answer the following question:

- According to Capp, where did early modern men and women learn ideas about masculinity and femininity?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

Capp suggests the ultimate prescriptive text regarding gender in early modern society was the Bible, but ideas were also circulated from medical science, law and custom.

The growth of print in early modern society led to new ways in which people could learn gendered ideas. There was gender prescription in some of the 'cheap print' sources you encountered in the chapter 'Literacy, learning and the printed word' (Chapter 12). For example, the gendered ideas in ballads, chapbooks and periodicals reached a wide audience.

Historians have been particularly interested in studying the gender ideas in the new genre of printed advice books, often known as **conduct books**, a publishing phenomenon from the late sixteenth century onwards. Conduct books were still extremely popular across Europe in the eighteenth century, with titles such as Thomas Marriott's *Female Conduct: Being an Essay on the Art of Pleasing* (1759) readily finding male and female readers among the middling sort and the elite.

Online session 14.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 14.1. This should take around 50 minutes.

The patriarchal model taught by the conduct books imposed 'duties' on early modern men and women. Men were to aspire to marry and become trustworthy, economically self-sufficient householders who were active in the wider community. Women, on the other hand, were to be kept to the home, chaste and silent, with married women organising their households while remaining obedient to their husbands.

You might be wondering why conduct book authors were so concerned about prescribing gender roles. Many thought that regulating gender roles was a way of regulating the social order in early modern Europe: the ordered patriarchal household was a microcosm of an ordered patriarchal society. This idea was made explicit in the conduct book, *A Godlie Form of Householde Government* (1598), written by two clergymen, John Dod (1550–1645) and Robert Cleaver (d. c.1613):

A Householde is as it were a little commonwealth, by the good government wherof, God's glorie may be advaunced [advanced]; the common wealth, which standeth of severall families, benefited; and al that live in that familie may receive much comfort and commoditie.

(Dod and Cleaver, 1598, p. 13)

By **commonwealth**, the authors mean the state or, more specifically, all the people living within a state. In essence, Dod and Cleaver are arguing that a well-ordered household means well-ordered communities, in a progression that stretches from the household, through local communities – be they rural or urban – and then up to the highest levels of society. They are saying that disordered gender relations have implications far beyond the walls of the household.

Reading against the grain

Prescriptive texts such as conduct books can be useful for historians, providing evidence of contemporary ideas about gender. Yet these texts have their limitations. They offer a very restrictive conception of femininity, limited to life within the household, and a much less restrictive conception of masculinity, focused on activity outside of the home. However, that is only their intended message. As gender historians, we need to use other research methodologies to discover whether that is the whole story. One method that we can use to do this is ‘reading against the grain’: looking beyond the surface meaning of such sources to see if they have more to tell us.

Have a look at the print *Tittle-Tattle: Or, the Several Branches of Gossiping* (Figure 14.2). A copy of the image is available on the module website too, where you can zoom in and see more details. This was published in England in the mid-eighteenth century, but was printed from an earlier woodcut made in the Netherlands around 1600; in turn that was based on a still earlier French print, *Le Caquet des femmes* (‘The clucking of women’), dating from 1560, as well as two early seventeenth-century German etchings (O’Connell, 2007, p. 71). The image was therefore known in various forms across Europe in our period.

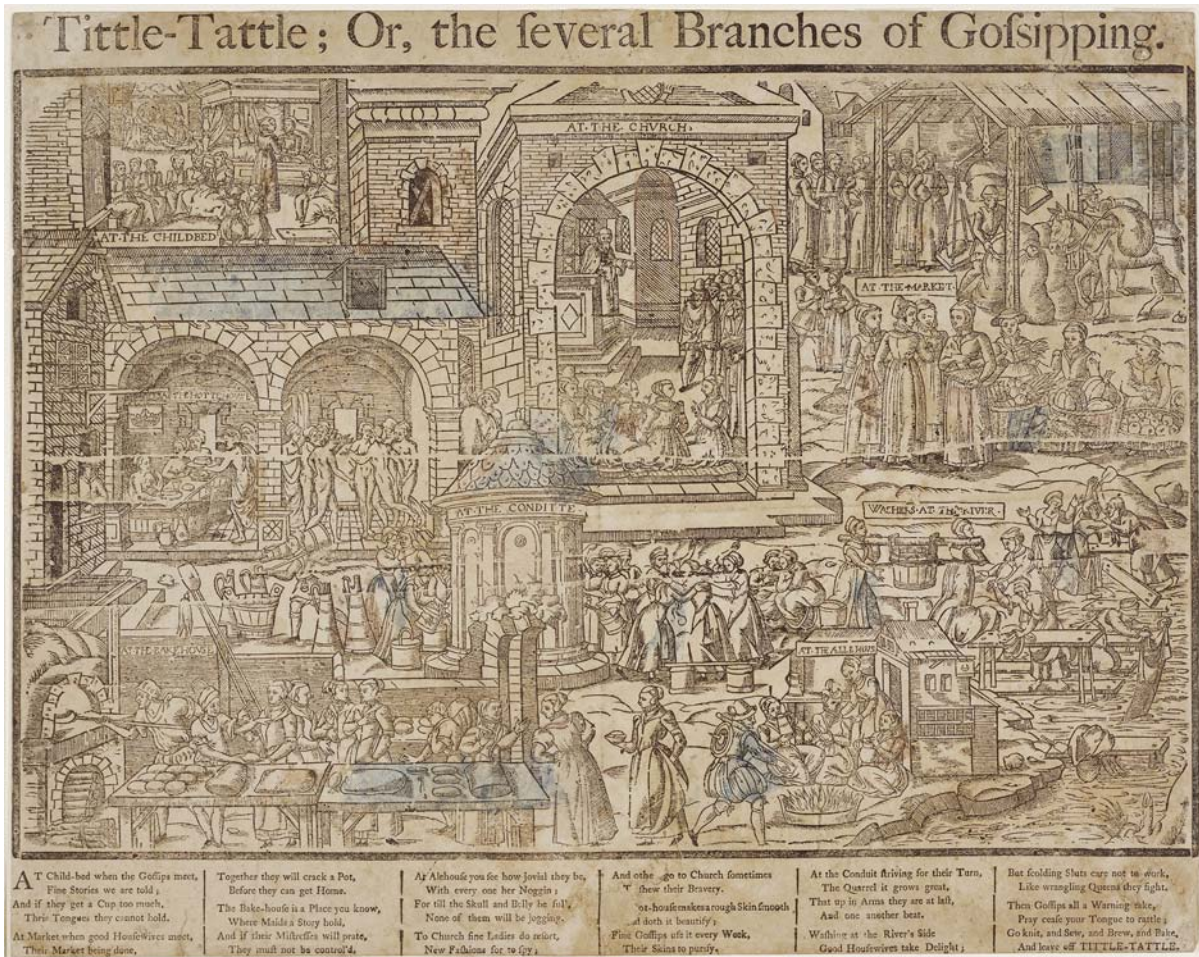


Figure 14.2 Anonymous printmaker, *Tittle-Tattle: Or, the Several Branches of Gossiping*, this impression c.1750, hand-coloured woodcut print. British Museum, London, PD 1973.U.216. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This print is a warning against women's gossip, with accompanying moral verses, with lines such as 'Then Gossips all a Warning take,/Pray cease your Tongue to rattle'. So if we take the image and the verses together, they tell us about the restrictions on women's speech in contemporary society. However, in warning against women's speech, the print also unwittingly tells us about how women actually behaved in early modern communities. It reveals the spaces in towns and villages where women met. They are warned not to gossip in the following places (from middle clockwise): at the church; at the market; at the river washing clothes; at the alehouse; at the bakehouse; at the well; at the bathhouse; and at the bed of a woman in labour. In doing so, however, the print acknowledges that these were all spaces for

women and women's speech: these women were not confined to the patriarchal household and the authority of their husbands, but instead were active and vocal in their communities.

This sort of 'reading against the grain' can also be effectively employed with written prescriptive texts.

Exercise 14.3

Turn to Reading 14.1, 'The ideal wife' and Reading 14.2, 'The real wife', located at the end of the chapter. These are both extracts from 'A Christal Glas for christian women' (1592), a book written by an English clergyman, Philip Stubbes (c.1555–c.1610), describing his late wife, Katherine (1570/1–1590).

As you consider Reading 14.1, think about the following question:

- How does Stubbes present his late wife as an ideal example of a woman for others to follow?

As you consider Reading 14.2, think about whether it is possible to read the source 'against the grain' and answer this question:

- Are there any hints that, in reality, Katherine actually went beyond the ideals prescribed by her husband?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

In Reading 14.1 Stubbes suggests that his wife followed the gender ideals prescribed in the Bible, and so was a quiet, solitary woman who rarely left her home. However, Reading 14.2 suggests that Katherine Stubbes could be outspoken on occasion; she spoke out against those of different religious beliefs she met in the street, such as atheists and Catholics (termed 'Papists' by Stubbes), and she was happy to engage in vigorous religious conversation with her husband.

We need to be careful not to think that prescriptive works offer a picture of gender relations in practice in early modern society. They simply present a recommendation of how to behave, rather than a description of contemporary gender relations – hence the importance of reading them for further clues as to how men and women really interacted. It is widely accepted by historians that there is a mismatch between the prescription and the practice of early modern gender, as we will explore in the next section.

14.3 Manhood

As we have seen, prescriptive texts imposed ‘duties’ on early modern men and women. The historian Alexandra Shepard has analysed these to suggest that patriarchal manhood in this period was not something men automatically possessed; rather, it was a status that came with certain responsibilities. She argues that while manhood was based on gender difference, it was not a status open to all men. It was instead restricted to a specific type of man: the economically self-sufficient middle-aged married householder (Shepard, 2003). Manhood was therefore a phase in the life cycle and something that men could attain when they possessed the attributes suitable to governing and supporting the household, such as having the correct temperament to oversee the behaviour of their dependants. Manhood was also associated with honour, as a man needed a good reputation for business dealings in a society where transactions were largely based on personal credit; there were no credit cards, so respect for a man’s word was central to his financial standing.

Exercise 14.4

The following example is drawn from the legal records of seventeenth-century Castile in Spain.

As you read the passage, think about the following question:

- Why did Lopez bring a criminal case against Ruiz?

This should take around 10 minutes.

In 1615 Gaspar Ruiz asked Andres Lopez Portillo to pay him a small debt of 30 *maravedís* for some charcoal that he had sold him, but Lopez replied that he did not owe Ruiz anything, maintaining that he had already paid the full price. After this denial, Ruiz called Lopez a “filthy, ill-born knave.” In response, Lopez said that, “He was as good as Ruiz,” to which Ruiz retorted, “Not even as good as my ass.” Ruiz then went around [his town of] Yébenes recruiting witnesses who would support his version of the facts in a lawsuit. In response, Lopez opened a criminal case against Ruiz, claiming that he was “taking away my good reputation, name, and repute, and doing me ill.” During the criminal investigation, the magistrate who questioned Ruiz asked if he recognized that Lopez was

“a good man, honorable and of good name, repute, and opinion, well born and from an honorable family and kin.” Ruiz agreed.

(Taylor, 2003, p. 16)

Discussion

Lopez needed to silence Ruiz because without a good reputation as an honourable man, he would be hindered in his future business dealings and his livelihood could be ruined.

Patriarchal manhood was also age-bounded. Medical texts argued that there were different stages in men’s lives, a concept to which you were introduced in the chapter ‘Bodies, life cycles and illness’ (Chapter 4) in Book 1. These texts suggested that young men were given to excessive behaviour, while in old age men ran the risk of diminished capabilities and even senility; in between lay full manhood and the ‘manly age’, although writers disagreed on the exact age when this fell. In Table 14.1 you can see the slightly different ages suggested by sixteenth-century French and Dutch texts.

Table 14.1 Differing ideas about the ages of man

Jean Goeurot, <i>L’Entretienement de vie</i> [<i>The maintenance of life</i>] (1537, Lyon)		Levinus Lemnius, <i>De habitu et constitutione corporis</i> [<i>Concerning the condition and constitution of the body</i>] (1561, Antwerp)	
childhood	to 25 years	infancy	to 7 years
		childhood	7–15
		puberty	15–18
		adolescence	18–25
youth	25–35	youth	25–35
middle age	35–50	man’s age	35–50
old age	50+	old age	50/65+

(Adapted from Shepard, 2003, p. 55)

Patriarchal manhood has been described as ‘hegemonic manhood’; this is a term devised by the sociologist Raewyn Connell to describe the dominant form of manhood in a society at any given time (Connell, 1987). If the economically self-sufficient middle-aged married householder, the patriarch, was the dominant type of masculinity in early modern society, then many men would have been excluded from proper manhood. Table 14.1 indicates that age was one reason for exclusion from this dominant type of manhood, but also excluded were those who could not fulfil the other responsibilities that came with this form of masculinity; any unmarried men, those in service and the infirm would have been unable to possess full manhood as defined in the period. For example, from the mid-sixteenth through to the eighteenth century noble families in Italy tried to allow only one, or perhaps two sons per generation to marry, in order to preserve the family’s wealth; the result was that a large proportion of noblemen never married, with over 50 per cent of the male aristocracy in Milan in 1650 remaining unmarried, and so unable to aspire to the dominant model of manhood (Pomata, 2002, p. 83).

Many of the men who fell outside of this patriarchal ideal did not simply accept their subordinate status and instead sought to possess other definitions of manhood. In Catholic countries, some men could seek alternative forms of manhood by entering the clergy; celibacy was obligatory for the Catholic priesthood, yet clergymen would gain respect from their position in the church. There were other ways to attempt to achieve manhood, even if only temporarily. For example, some men, especially young ones, unable to gain authority from patriarchal manhood, turned to violence as a way of proving their masculinity. The court records for prosecutions involving knife-fighting in early modern Amsterdam reveal that the men involved in this sort of violence were not patriarchal householders; instead they were on the margins of society. These men believed that such violence was a way of demonstrating their masculinity; the court records show that knife-fighting was their response to attacks on their masculine honour, such as being labelled a *schelm*, a scoundrel or petty thief, or, in the case of younger men, being called a boy or ‘little brother’ (Spierenburg, 1998, p. 116). Men outside of the patriarchal ideal would also boast about their sexual conquests as a way of bolstering their masculinity, as you will see in the later discussion of **libertinism**. Mark Breitenberg has thus recently suggested that masculinity was more ‘inherently anxious’ in this period than we had previously thought, certainly more anxious than acknowledged by the prescriptive texts (Breitenberg, 1996, p. 4).

One type of man that was particularly excluded from patriarchal conceptions of manhood was the journeyman. Journeymen were those who had served a trade apprenticeship and thereafter worked for a daily wage, rather than for themselves. In periods of economic expansion, apprentices and journeymen would aspire to marry and to adopt 'hegemonic' forms of manhood. However, this was less achievable in periods of economic contraction such as in the sixteenth century, as guilds would place limitations on the number of new masters. Journeymen thus faced a lifetime of waged work and sought to define themselves as a separate group of men through the establishment of journeymen's guilds. (You were introduced to guilds in the chapters 'Work and reward' (Chapter 5 in Book 1) and 'Urban communities' (Chapter 10).)

Online session 14.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 14.2. This should take around 45 minutes.

14.4 Womanhood

We have learned that there were anxieties in the patriarchal model for men. Not all men were able to be the middle-aged economically self-sufficient married householder of the prescriptive texts, and so they negotiated the gender ideas of the period in their everyday lives. What, then, of women? We have seen that the prescriptive ideal for women was that of **deference** and obedience, with the early modern married woman submitting to the authority of her husband and allowing him to act on behalf of the family in the local community. Let us now consider whether the practice of early modern femininity was more complex than the simple message laid out in the prescriptive texts. To understand early modern womanhood in practice, we need to consider whether married women owed deference to men other than their husbands. Even the prescriptive texts at their most restrictive suggest that women were under the authority only of their husbands or, if unmarried, their fathers. They do not suggest that women should be deferential to other men in their lives, such as brothers, servants and male neighbours. Moreover, even if women owed obedience to their husbands, there could be cases where women had to be self-sufficient and hold authority themselves. A husband might either be away from home, whether because of business or warfare, or unable to act on behalf of the family, for example because of ill health.

To make matters more complex, not all early modern households were headed by a man, as there were unmarried women who lived alone, as well as widows. Widows were less likely to remarry in early modern society than widowers, so widowhood brought challenges to the patriarchal model. When a woman was widowed, she was expected to assume her husband's authority in the home, yet at the same time she was also without protection in a patriarchal society. The widow of a craftsman, if she did not remarry, would often attempt to continue her husband's trade. There could, however, be restrictions on her activity, for example she could be forced to hire a journeyman, and, overall, this opportunity for widows to assume authority declined throughout our period, as guild restrictions against women tightened across Europe. Poverty was an ever-present risk for widows outside the higher levels of society. Widowhood as a status brought a mixture of opportunity and misfortune, which was negotiated in different ways by different widows.

In order to work out an individual woman's social status, we have to think about her place in the various hierarchies that defined the early modern social order. Gender might be one hierarchy, but social rank was another. There were other hierarchies in early modern Europe too, such as age: in this period both youth and extreme old age were less respected than middle age, as we have seen. These hierarchies interacted with each other and it was the results of this interaction that dictated the authority or deference between individuals within their communities. To give an example, a noblewoman would have had a high place in the hierarchy of social rank and that would have been more important than her place in the gender hierarchy. Therefore a noblewoman like Lady Anne Clifford (1590–1676), who you were introduced to in the chapter 'A sense of self: individualism' (Chapter 8) in Book 1, would certainly not have deferred to a male servant!

This might all seem very complicated, but the point here is that women in early modern society were not necessarily deferential to all men. Their own personal authority and social status were dependent on their gender, but also on issues including whether they were married and what rank they held in society, their age and their behaviour. There was not a simple blanket idea in early modern Europe that all men were authoritative and all women were subordinate.

This is more complex than the views of femininity taught in prescriptive texts, because of the mismatch between the prescription and the practice of early modern gender. One of the methodologies of the gender historian is to look at different types of sources, beyond the prescriptive texts alone, to discover how people really behaved. They use sources such as legal records and letters to reveal the practice of gender relations at this time, as we shall explore in online session 14.3.

Online session 14.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 14.3. This should take around 2 hours.

14.5 Policing gender roles

Although gender roles in this patriarchal society were constantly negotiated, dependent on context and issues such as social rank, age or marital status, it seems there were certain bounds to the negotiation, suggesting we should not entirely disregard the ideals we find in the prescriptive literature. The pressure to conform to these ideals did not come just from prescriptive texts. Early modern communities themselves were interested in policing certain gender norms (see Figure 14.3).



Figure 14.3 Erhard Schön, *Kein edler schatz ist auff der ert/Dann ein frums weib die ehr begert* ('There is no greater prize on earth than a devoted wife who prizes her honour'), 1533, woodcut. This is a German broadsheet print; you may remember looking at the image in Chapter 2 in Book 1. On the far left is a husband and wife, with the husband crawling on all fours, drawing a laundry cart; the wife is whipping him like a horse, while wearing her husband's sword, purse and codpiece, symbolising her taking on his male authority within society. This image is important evidence for this chapter too, as members of the local community are watching: a young man and his sweetheart, an old woman and an old man are all judging the couple for this gender inversion. Photo: Schlossmuseum Gotha, Inv. No.: 40.5.

Disorderly men and women

How were gender ideas policed? Gossip was one way of policing gender norms and it was a powerful form of social control in early modern communities; as we learned when looking at the print *Tittle-Tattle* (Figure 14.2), it was thought to be a particularly female and potentially subversive activity. Another way of policing infractions of the patriarchal order was through mockery of the individuals in question. Sometimes this could just consist of the singing of mocking songs and the banging of pots and pans by members of the community, often young men. It could also be more developed, involving a procession, dressing in masks and costumes, and submitting the victim or victims to a humiliating ritual, for example parading backwards on a horse or ass. This sort of popular ritual can be found all across early modern Europe. You will learn more about the mechanisms of these shaming rituals, which were sometimes called skimmingtons, in the chapter ‘Popular action: ritual, protest and riot’ (Chapter 16), but here we are concerned with the causes.

Exercise 14.5

Look at Figure 14.4. The two images shown are from a plasterwork panel in the Great Hall at Montacute House in Somerset, dating from around 1600. The frieze is prominently displayed above the fireplace, so all visitors would have been able to see it.

What story do you think the frieze is trying to tell? (Copies of the images are available on the module website where you can zoom in, if you have trouble making out the details.)

Don't worry if you can't work out what's going on, as we will explore the images further in the discussion.

This should take around 5 minutes.



Figure 14.4 'Skimmington ride', c.1600, plasterwork panel in the Great Hall at Montacute House, Somerset. Photo: © National Trust Photographic Library/Nadia Mackenzie/Bridgeman Images.

Discussion

In the first image we see a husband being beaten by his wife, who is using her shoe to administer the beating, while he takes care of the baby; he may also be drunk, as he is shown helping himself to ale. This is a house where patriarchal gender norms are inverted: the man is caring for the child, while the wife is the dominant figure. His inebriation is a further sign of his loss of masculine control. Moreover, the gender inversion is witnessed by the figure on the far left of the image. This witness might simply be a neighbour, but he is also holding a document, so he may be an official within the local community, perhaps a village constable. The second image shows the skimmington, the community punishment of the husband, forced to ride the wooden horse, in this case represented by a simple pole or broom. It is men from the local community who are administering the punishment; the figure to the immediate right of the husband riding the wooden horse is most probably a man dressed in women's clothes, rather than a woman. The reason why that figure is dressed in women's clothes is linked to the shaming ritual: cross-dressing in early modern society was a sign of disorder, of a 'world turned upside down'. The husband's punishment for allowing his wife to dominate him is not an official one; instead it is an informal shaming at the hands of his neighbours.

It was not just dominated or drunken husbands who received the attention of the skimmington. Adulterers could also receive such treatment, as could those who made what were thought to be unmatched marriages, for example a couple with a wide disparity in their ages. Such attentions were directed at those thought to have transgressed or broken the patriarchal norms of the local community.

Early modern communities did not always act as the ultimate form of authority in cases of gender transgressions; in other words, neighbours did not always act as judge and jury themselves. They had various means of appealing to higher authorities for intervention. In 1667 in Constance in Germany, a petition was put to the town council that a tailor, a pastry cook and their wives should be made 'to live together more peacefully' or else leave (Rublack, 1999, p. 207). Communities could also bring gender transgressors to the attention of the courts, as in the case of scolding.

A scold was defined in one seventeenth-century source as ‘a troublesome or angry woman, who by her brawling and wrangling amongst her Neighbours, doth break the publick Peace, and beget, cherish and increase publick Discord’ (quoted in Boose, 1991, p. 186). In other words, the scold, usually a woman, was given to activity such as extreme gossiping, nagging or the use of foul language, and their speech destabilised the whole community. Scolds may have troubled the neighbourhood for many years before anything formal was done about their behaviour. However, communities could bring scolds to the attention of the courts. Scolding could be prosecuted in a variety of early modern courts and evidence of misbehaviour was provided in **depositions**. Prosecutions for scolding show that while female speech in early modern communities was powerful, it could also be dangerous.

There were various shaming punishments to impose on convicted scolds; they might be imprisoned in the town stocks, or marched round town with cymbals being beaten before them. They also might be ducked in the local pond or river using a specifically designed cucking-stool (see Figure 14.5), or silenced by the branks or scold’s bridle. The bridle was an iron muzzle which enclosed the head and prevented the wearer from speaking. A film of a scold’s bridle is available in the ‘Early modern world in objects’ section of the module website (see also Figure 14.6). Scold’s bridles were particularly used in the British Isles in this period, especially in the north of England and in Scotland, although there are surviving examples of bridles elsewhere in Europe too.

Historians dispute how prevalent these sorts of shaming punishments were for scolding women. David Underdown suggested that for England, the period 1560–1640 was marked by a ‘gender crisis’, demonstrated in part by an increased incidence of prosecutions of women for scolding (Underdown, 1985). Many other historians, most notably Martin Ingram, have criticised this argument. Ingram has compared the number of scolding prosecutions in Underdown’s ‘crisis’ period with those that occurred pre-1560 to argue against a sudden upsurge of prosecutions; Ingram further suggests that many villages and towns went many years between 1560 and 1640 without prosecuting a scold. There were exceptions in some towns, including

Nottingham and Manchester; the higher incidence of prosecution for scolding in these urban areas may have been because outspoken women were more troublesome to the authorities in the crowded conditions of a town. Thus while Ingram questions the idea of a crisis, he does not suggest that extreme acts of verbal insult by women were condoned at the time, nor that there were not prosecutions for scolding in this period (Ingram, 1995). Such punishment of scolding women reveals that early modern communities policed women who were thought to have disobeyed gender norms and in doing so threatened the social order.



Figure 14.5 A cucking-stool (later known as a ducking-stool) in action, depicted in a woodcut from around 1700. The shaming punishment was carried out in view of the local community, shown to the right of the image. Photo: © Bridgeman Images.



Figure 14.6 Ralph Gardiner, *England's Grievance Discovered*, 1655, engraving. London, R. Ibbitson and P. Stent. British Library, London, 1029. b.4. This shows Anne Bidlestone being processed through the streets of Newcastle upon Tyne in 1653, wearing a scold's bridle as punishment. Photo: © The British Library Board.

Honour and defamation: the double standard?

Court records also allow historians to consider another way in which gender was policed by patriarchal communities: conceptions of honour. The construction of honour has been widely debated by early modern historians; you have already encountered ideas about noble honour in

the chapter ‘The European elite: nobility and gentry’ (Chapter 7) in Book 1. There have also been several mentions of honour already in this chapter. For example, the idea of male financial standing being dependent on an individual’s personal ‘credit’ is a way of thinking about honour. Words such as ‘credit’, ‘worth’ and ‘honesty’ were all early modern terms for ‘honour’.

The idea that sexual behaviour was at the centre of female honour was suggested by the historian Keith Thomas as long ago as 1959; he argued that there was a ‘double standard’ in which sexual misbehaviour by women was condemned by early modern communities, whereas male transgressions were thought of as relatively trivial (Thomas, 1959). This argument has been developed in more recent research, notably that of Laura Gowing, who has used English **church court** records as evidence to explore male and female ideas of honour. Gowing has looked at defamation prosecutions (defamation was the crime of publicly attacking someone’s reputation). Her work on these court records has shown that women’s honour was centred on their sexual reputation, so to accuse them of unchastity was to undermine their whole morality and wider reputation. This compares with contemporary ideas of male honour, which were based on more than just sexual purity. From exploring defamation depositions, Gowing has argued that women themselves were complicit in this gendered honour system: women accused other women of whoredom (Gowing, 1996). Therefore women, as much as men, had a crucial role in policing and perpetuating gendered reputation.

Exercise 14.6

Turn to Reading 14.3, ‘Elizabeth Bromley vs. Edith Griffyn, London consistory court (1566)’, located at the end of the chapter. A consistory court was a type of church court; this is an extract from a deposition made to such a court. Marion Johnson is the deponent, the woman giving evidence about the incident between Elizabeth Bromley (the woman bringing the defamation case) and Edith Griffyn (the woman accused of defaming Bromley); all the reported speech in the extract is Edith’s. You may have to read the document several times to understand it. Sections in italics in the reading are translated from Latin.

As you read, think about the following questions:

- What caused the incident?
- In what terms did Edith Griffyn attack Elizabeth Bromley's honour and reputation?
- What effect did Edith's outburst have for Elizabeth?

This should take around 30 minutes.

Discussion

Elizabeth Bromley had previously accused Edith Griffyn of stealing, but Edith questioned Elizabeth's honesty in a counter-accusation: she called Elizabeth a 'whore', and moreover an 'arrant [notorious] whore', who was known to be a whore by the local community. Elizabeth felt that her reputation 'in the eyes of good and honest men' was destroyed by such an attack.

There are limits to the argument that women's sexual honour was far more vulnerable than men's. Christine Peters has suggested that while 'whore' was a powerful term of abuse for women, men were also affected by attacks on their sexual honour; men were labelled 'whoremaster' or 'whoremonger', which in this period did not mean a 'pimp' or manager of prostitutes, but a 'habitual fornicator or adulterer' (Peters, 2003, p. 336). To call a man a whoremonger was therefore to suggest he was failing in his patriarchal duties, in that he was overcome by sexual passion and unable to control himself as a true man.

Once again, we need to think about the type of evidence in question. More women than men brought cases of defamation in the church courts in this period. In Durham consistory court, 225 defamation cases were brought between 1604 and 1665; of these, only 76 were brought by men (Foyster, 1999, p. 77). Therefore the nature of the evidence is skewed to reveal the ways in which women, rather than men, were defamed; in other words, the evidence from church courts may well exaggerate the association between female honour and sexuality.

Notions of male and female honour were also affected by social status. Faramerz Dabhoiwala has suggested that for women 'chastity was a

prerequisite, not a measure of reputation'; by that, he means that it was assumed women would be sexually honourable, so unless women's chastity was questioned, their honour and reputation were based on other issues, such as their social and economic status. Dabhoiwala has argued that on certain occasions, social status could even override female sexual dishonour (Dabhoiwala, 1996).

Exercise 14.7

Read the extract below from a memoir written about Barbara Palmer, the Countess of Castlemaine (c.1640–1709), just after her death. The countess was the favourite mistress of Charles II (1630–1685, reigned 1660–85) during the 1660s, despite her marriage to Roger Palmer (1634–1705). The latter was raised to the peerage largely as a result of his wife's affair.

As you read, think about the following question:

- Was the countess perceived as an honourable woman?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Whatever Character has been given to this Lady, rais'd to those Dignities she enjoyed, by satisfying the Pleasures of a Prince, which condition is always attended with much Envy, we cannot but take notice, that her Birth and Quality, was otherwise very Noble, and the King might add to her Titles, but very little to her Blood; she was the Daughter of William Villiers, Viscount Grandison in Ireland (though of a very Noble and Flourishing Family in England) and the Wife of Roger Palmer Esq; who was created Earl of Castlemain.

This Lady coming first to the Court of King *Charles* the second, was singled out by the King as a worthy Object of his Passion, being then one of the most Beautiful Ladies of her time; and to whom he made very warm Addresses, till by the alluring Bait of Honour and Preferment he won her to his Embraces.

(Anonymous, 1709, p. 2)

Discussion

Because of the high social status of her family, the countess was considered to be an honourable woman despite her adulterous long-term sexual relationship with the king. There is even the suggestion that the affair itself bestowed honour on the countess, as it was conducted with the king.

Social status could also counteract male sexual dishonour. At the end of the seventeenth century and until the late eighteenth century, libertinism also changed the conception of male honour for a small group of high-ranking men; they believed in sexually free behaviour rather than confining sex to within marriage. In England libertinism flourished at the court of Charles II in the 1660s and 1670s, while in France the late eighteenth-century novels of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) advanced libertine debauchery in graphic detail. For libertine men, sexual conquests were a way to enhance their reputations and acquire a greater sense of masculine honour. This may put you in mind of the alternative conceptions of manhood you encountered earlier in the chapter. It is questionable, however, how much these ideas penetrated into wider society, even if libertine novels became popular clandestine reading in the late eighteenth century. It seems likely that libertine behaviour in practice was contained to the elite and that social status was integral to any tolerance of this activity. Again, age is also important; throughout this period there was more tolerance of young men enjoying a period of ‘libertine’ excess before marriage.

14.6 Continuity or change?

Throughout this chapter we have seen that early modern gender ideas were constantly being negotiated. Therefore we need to ask the question: was there ever a period of marked change? Exercise 14.8 will help you start to think about this issue.

Exercise 14.8

Now turn to Bernard Capp, 'Gender and family' in the set book and read the section on 'Continuity and change' in gender relations on pages 44–6. Take notes as you read.

This should take around 10 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

From your reading of Capp in exercise 14.8, you will have seen that historians have often looked to periods of intense political or religious change to see whether there was a corresponding shift in gender roles. This approach was also taken in the chapter 'Popular Christianity and personal faith' (Chapter 2) in Book 1, which looked at the impact of the early Reformation on ideas of womanhood. It is questionable, however, whether the political and religious categories of traditional history can help us to understand the formation of gender. To explore this issue, we can look at the case study of the English civil wars to see how they affected gender roles.

Gender and the English civil wars

The English civil wars were part of the **Wars of the Three Kingdoms** that divided the people of the British Isles during the mid-seventeenth century; in England this was marked by conflict in the years 1642–1651 between the royalists ('Cavaliers'), supporters of the monarch Charles I (1600–1649, reigned 1625–49), and the Parliamentarians ('Roundheads'). If you want to learn more about the civil wars, you can read about them in Bernard Capp and Colin Jones, 'Revolution: England and France' in the set book (pages 328–32, 'England'). This

was a time of intense political and religious change, but did it witness a similar shift in gender roles?



Figure 14.7 From the pamphlet *The Resolution of the Women of London to the Parliament*, 1642, woodcut. Published in London for William Watson. The husband in this woodcut print is urged by his wife to 'Go to the wars'; his manhood will be proved by fighting. Photo: © The Stapleton Collection/ Bridgeman Images.

Men on either side of the conflict attacked each other in words and print as effeminate or inadequate examples of manliness (see Figure 14.7), as much as they attacked each other in physical battle. Charles I was accused of being under the authority of his French-born wife, Henrietta Maria (1609–1669). One contemporary observer stated that 'wherever male princes are so effeminate as to suffer women of foreign birth and different religions or intermeddle with the affairs of state, it is always found to produce sad desolations' (quoted in Hughes, 2012, p. 62).

However, the majority of research on gender during the civil wars has focused on female gender roles, as these were arguably subject to greater change during this period. For some women, the wars allowed them to take on new roles within the patriarchal order of early modern society. Some became permanently in charge of the family following the deaths of their husbands; as many as 80,000 men may have been killed during the wars (Hughes, 2012, p. 42). Many others became temporary heads of their households while their husbands were either away fighting, in exile or imprisoned. For those women left in control of the household, this could include taking on their husband's authority in practical ways, for example in maintaining the family business or, in the case of elite women, defending the family estate from siege, as in the example of Lady Brilliana Harley (c.1598–1643). Brilliana was praised by the military captain Priam Davies for showing 'masculine bravery' in her defence of her estate, Brampton Bryan Castle, during a three-month siege by royalist troops in 1643, yet Brilliana defined her actions in conventional terms: 'my dear husband hath entrusted me with his house and children, and therefore I cannot dispose of his house but according to his pleasure' (quoted in Hughes, 2012, p. 38). While some women therefore had greater authority during the wars, we need to remember that throughout the early modern period wives were supposed to assume authority over the household in their husbands' absence.

So where else might we look to consider changes in the roles allowed to women? There was more scope for women's political engagement during the civil wars, and they can be found protesting and petitioning (see Figure 14.8). For instance, women petitioned Parliament for peace in August 1643, writing 'your poor petitioners (though the weaker sex) do too sensibly perceive the desolation of the kingdom' (quoted in Hughes, 2012, p. 57). While women were therefore entering the political arena, they were doing so with reference to their subordinate position as women. Moreover, petitioning and protesting were well-established forms of female political activity before the wars, with women emphasising their roles as wives and mothers as legitimating their right to petition.

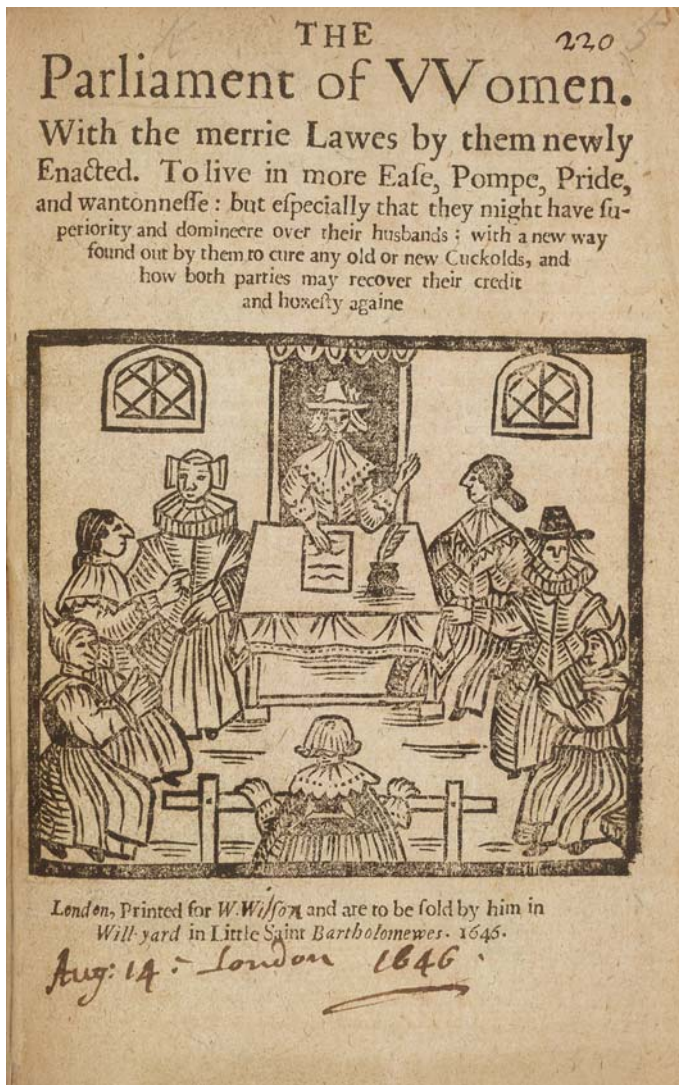


Figure 14.8 Title page from *The Parliament of Women. With the merrie Lawes by them newly Enacted. To live in more Ease, Pompe, Pride, and wantonnesse: but especially that they might have superiority and domineere over their husbands ...*, 1646. Published and sold by W. Wilson, London. British Library, London, E.1150.(5). The extended title on the front of this pamphlet reveals that it was satirising women's petitioning of Parliament as unwomanly. Photo: © The British Library Board.

There was a profusion of radical political sects during the civil wars, with sizeable numbers of female members. Yet even the most radical political groups could support traditional gender ideas. Gerrard Winstanley (c.1609–1676) was one of the Diggers, a group calling for the abolition of private property and a return to a past golden age

when property was held in common. Despite this radical social vision, Winstanley argued for a conservative vision of the patriarchal family. According to Winstanley, if a father was ‘weak, sick, or naturally foolish, wanting the power of wisdom and government, or should be dead before his children should be instructed’, then his wife and children should be transferred to the patriarchal authority of another household (Hughes, 2012, p. 118). His radical political fervour did not translate into a radical rethinking of gender norms.

During and after the wars there was also a growth of religious sects, such as the Brownists, the Ranters and the Quakers. Although they held differing theological views, they all stood apart from the tenets of the Church of England. Women held important roles during the early development of the sects. The Quakers, perhaps the best known of these and one still in existence today, had a considerable number of female members in the years immediately after the wars; these female Quakers published pamphlets defining their beliefs and, perhaps more significantly, were allowed a ‘pouring forth of the spirit’ in their religious meetings, which meant they were allowed to **prophesy** (see Figure 14.9). Female Quakers were not the only women to prophesy during the 1640s and 1650s; other figures such as Lady Eleanor Davies (1590–1652) and Anna Trapnel (active 1642–1660) also earned notoriety as female prophets at this time. We should be clear that these women were not adopting the role of preacher: something still limited, even in the radical sects, to men. The Quaker George Keith (1638?–1716) discussed the nature of female prophesying thus:

If [women] speak, they are not to do it by permission, but by commandment, whereas it is permitted unto Men, at times, to speak in the church ... An unlearned man may be permitted to ask a question in the church, which is not permitted unto a Woman, nor is it needful, for She may ask her Husband at home. But if the Spirit of the Lord Command or move a godly and Spiritually Learned Woman to speak, in that case she is the Lord’s more than her Husband’s, and she is to speak, yea, though the Husband should forbid her.

(Quoted in Mack, 1982, pp. 27–8)

Prophesying means channelling the word of God, so it was argued that it was God's word that female prophets were speaking, not their own. The majority of the civil war sects came to an end with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 and with that the roles for female prophesying also vanished. The Quakers were one of the few sects that survived, but they became more traditionally patriarchal by 1700; women were discouraged from taking up too much time in public meetings and older women were instructed to help younger women control their prophesying (Mack, 1982, p. 34).



Figure 14.9 Copy after Egbert van Heemskerck, *A Quaker Meeting*, original 1678, oil on canvas; 42 x 72 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA1949.202. This late seventeenth-century painting satirises the Quaker movement, showing a woman prophesying to a meeting from an upturned barrel in a kitchen, while snarling cats look on from the top left corner and a dog urinates on a woman's dress to the bottom left of the image. The satire reveals the wider social ridicule of women's prophesying. Photo: © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Exercise 14.9

Compare what you have just read about gender during the civil wars with the notes you took in exercise 14.8 on the 'Continuity and change' section of the chapter on gender in the set book.

Think about the following question:

- Can you identify any lasting changes to gender roles in either the material above on the civil wars or in your notes on the 'Continuity and change' section in the set book?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Despite some women negotiating more personal authority, many of the patriarchal ideas about male authority seem to have remained in place.

The lack of change in gender relations across the period is partly explained by patriarchy being such a flexible code; patriarchal norms could be negotiated by individuals, while still operating in a broad sense. It is therefore questionable whether it is helpful to look at traditional political and religious chronologies to find changes in gender relations, as so much of gender history concerns the daily negotiations between men and women, acting in conjunction with issues such as age and social status. The history of gender is therefore a complex one. As historians we have to struggle with the task of uncovering how shifting gender roles operated every day in the communities of early modern Europe, in the shadow of a largely unchanging model of patriarchal authority.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how gender was constructed for early modern men and women. We have seen that certain key gender ideas held considerable weight in early modern society. These centred on the idea that the married man of middling age should rule his household and that his wife should be subordinate to his authority. These ideas come through strongly in the prescriptive sources, although these texts also acknowledge that wives held authority over others in the household, such as children and servants. Even at their most prescriptive, these ideals did not advocate complete subordination for women.

We have also explored how men and women negotiated these ideas in practice. Many men were unable to live up to this model of patriarchal manhood, so sought other ways to form their own sense of manliness. Likewise, we have seen how women negotiated the gender norms and how their own social status and sense of authority was drawn from their place in several hierarchies, such as social rank and age, as well as gender. Different sources give different perspectives on gender issues. Sources such as letters and court records often appear to give a clearer picture of gender relationships in practice, although these sources have their drawbacks too. We should be aware that we sometimes need to read ‘against the grain’ of prescriptive sources to explore fully the nature of gender in this period.

The community was central to concepts of gender in early modern Europe. The household, the village, the church and the guild were some of the locations in which gender ideas were formed, negotiated, challenged and policed. The way people interacted every day was influenced by these gendered ideas and by the use of gendered language. You should therefore be aware of gender issues in other chapters, both those that came earlier in this module and those still to come, even when the subject matter initially seems remote from such concerns. I hope this chapter has convinced you of the importance of gender to life in early modern Europe and has shown you that we ignore gender issues to the detriment of our understanding of the past.

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Readings

Reading 14.1 Philip Stubbes, 'The ideal wife'

Source: Stubbes, P. (1592) *A Christal Glas for christian women*, London, sig. A2r-v.

[The spelling in this reading has been modernised for clarity.]

Calling to remembrance (most Christian reader) the final end of man's creation, which is to glorify God, and to edify one another in the way of true godliness, I thought it my duty as well in respect of the one, as in regard of the other, to publish this rare and wonderful example of the virtuous life, and Christian death of Mistress Katherine Stubbes, who whilst she lived, was a Mirror of womanhood, and now being dead, is a perfect pattern of true Christianity. ... She followed the commandment of our saviour Christ, who biddeth us to search the scriptures, for in them ye hope to have eternal life. She obeyed the commandment of the Apostle [St Paul], who biddeth women to be silent, and to learn of their husbands at home. ... And so gentle was she and courteous of nature, that she was never heard to give any the lie in all her life, nor so much as to (thou) any in anger. She was never known to fall out with any of her neighbours, nor with the least child that lived, much less to scold or brawl, as many will now a days for every trifle, or rather for no cause at all: and so solitary was she given, that she would very seldom or never, and that not without great constraint (and then not neither, except her husband were in company) go abroad with any, either to banquet or feast, to gossip or make merry (as they term it) in so much that she hath been noted to do it in contempt and disdain of others.

Reading 14.2 Philip Stubbes, 'The real wife'

Source: Stubbes, P. (1592) *A Christal Glas for christian women*, London, sig. A2r-v.

[The spelling in this reading has been modernised for clarity.]

She lived four years and almost a half [in marriage], very honestly and godly, with rare commendations of all that knew her, as well for her singular wisdom, as also for her modesty, courtesy, gentleness, affability and good government. And above all, for her fervent zeal which she

bare to the [religious] truth, wherein she seemed to surpass many: in so much, as if she chanced at any time to be in place where either Papists, or Atheists were, and heard them talk of Religion, of what countenance or credit soever they seemed to be, she would not yield a jot, nor give place unto them at all, but would most mightily justify the truth of God, against their blasphemous untruths, and convince them, yea, and confound them by the testimonies of the word of God. Which thing how could it be otherwise? For her whole heart was bent to seek the Lord, her whole delight was to be conversant in the scriptures, and to meditate upon them day and night: in so much that you could seldom or never have come into her house, and have found her without a bible, or some other good book in her hands. And when she was not reading, she would spend the time in conferring, talking and reasoning with her husband of the word of God, and of religion: asking him, what is the sense of this place, and what is the sense of that? How expound you this place, and how expound you that? What observe you of this place, and what observe you of that?

Reading 14.3 Elizabeth Bromley vs. Edith Griffyn, London consistory court (1566)

Source: Anthologised in Gowing, L. (2012) *Gender Relations in Early Modern England*, London, Routledge, p. 140.

Repeated in front of the bishop's official on the 18 November 1566 in the presence of me William Blakwell notary

Marion Johnson, wife of Francis Johnson, of the parish of St Giles in the Fields, where she has lived for 6 years and before that at Grindon Underwood, Bucks for 2 years, born at Simpson in the same county, aged about 40, and says she testifies freely. Examined first as to her knowledge of the parties she has known Elizabeth Bromley for 6 years and Edith Griffyn alias Mayne well since the time of quadragesima [Lent] last.

To the first she says that the contents of this one are true.

To the second by virtue of her oath she says and deposes that upon a certain day happening about midsummer last past before her examination as she remembers the time otherwise she does not remember and in the afternoon of the same day the articulate Elizabeth Bromley came home to this deponent's [Marion Johnson's] house being situated by the Strand within the parish of St Giles in the Field where she this deponent and the articulate Elizabeth Bromley sitting at her door and

talking together Edith Griffyn articulate being next neighbour unto the deponent and espying the said goodwife Bromley came to her and said unto her ‘Thou burdenest me [Edith Griffyn] that I should steal a saw and a pair of shoes out of Mr Darbie’s shop. But’ quoth the said Edith ‘thou [Elizabeth Bromley] art a whore and an arrant whore and if thou didst as I do thou wouldst not be so fat nor maintained by other women’s husbands and the best in the town will say that thou art an arrant whore.’ Then being present and hearing the premises this deponent[,] Margaret Boothe and Elizabeth Reynoldes with divers of the neighbours there about whose names this deponent remembreth not *as she says and otherwise she knows nothing to depose.*

To the third she says that the good fame or credit of the said Elizabeth Bromley by the speaking of the said words in the eyes of good and honest men is diminished as she says.

Chapter 15 Industry before industrialisation

Chris A. Williams

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand how a selection of goods were manufactured in early modern Europe
- identify some of the factors that shaped production
- use a range of sources to understand this process.

Introduction

You have already read about work in early modern Europe in the chapter ‘Work and reward’ (Chapter 5) in Book 1. In this chapter we turn our focus to the processes by which goods were produced: how they were organised, who was involved and what factors determined the success of manufacturing. You are probably familiar with the term ‘Industrial Revolution’, used to describe the major changes in the nineteenth century when production was massively expanded by the introduction of new powered machinery and the creation of large factories. But were there any major developments in production in the early modern period? Or did manufacturing remain much as it had in earlier times?

In the past, historians looked for forerunners of the Industrial Revolution in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They focused on new methods of production – for example in improved ways of farming – and new inventions such as agricultural seed drills (used to sow grain and other crops) or the first steam engines, developed in the 1710s. They also studied the organisation of work to see if they could identify the beginnings of an industrial workforce and focused on ‘proto-industries’ where large numbers of workers, labouring at home, undertook specific parts of production, such as preparing fibre or spinning yarn for cloth production.

More recently, historians have developed a broader picture of the early modern economy that instead of focusing on major new inventions explores how it grew through many small-scale improvements in technologies and through a diversification of products. For example, the creation of ribbon-weaving looms created a new area of production – and allowed many more people to trim their clothes with ribbons. Reorganising work into stages increased productivity and allowed the employment of less skilled workers. You may have heard of the Scottish economist Adam Smith (1723–1790) who, in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, first published in 1776, described how pin-making had been broken down into stages, greatly increasing productivity. Historians have also started to examine not just production (the supply of goods) but trade and consumption (the demand for goods) too, and how this became an important economic factor.

These many, small-scale developments in production, which occurred unevenly across the continent, make it very difficult to draw up a

comprehensive picture of early modern manufacturing. So this chapter focuses on three case studies to give you a sense of how manufacturing was organised and what factors helped to drive – or hamper – production. The first explores mining in the German lands in the sixteenth century through Agricola's *De re metallica*, a highly detailed guide to mining operations; the second analyses ironworking in an area of southern England known as the Weald; and the third looks at the production and consumption of linen and other textiles in France and Ireland.

To set the case studies in context, we start by looking at some readings to provide an overview of the continuity and change in early modern manufacture.

15.1 Early modern manufacturing

In exercise 15.1 you are asked to revisit a chapter in the set book you previously encountered in Chapter 5. The structure of this is very clear: the first sentence of each paragraph gives a good indication of what follows. However, the author, Steve Hindle, has used a large number of technical terms. It is tempting to try to skip over difficult terms, but reading a dense text slowly and methodically is a really useful skill. I find that the best way to make sense of this sort of text is to stop at the end of sentences and try to restate them to myself in different words. To help you work through the reading, I have provided an expanded glossary (terms are listed in alphabetical order). Some terms are also glossed in the set book.

Exercise 15.1

Now turn to Steve Hindle, 'The early modern economy' in the set book and read from 'Manufacturing and (proto-)industry' on page 82 up to '... the early industrial economy was passing' (the end of the 'Assessment' section) on page 87.

Make notes on the main points and take time to look up terms in the glossary when you are unsure of their meaning.

This should take around 50 minutes.

Glossary

blast furnaces: furnaces allowing a blast of hot compressed air to be introduced into a mixture of iron ore, coke and limestone to make iron

broadcloth: a dense, plain cloth, woven on a wide loom and then shrunk to give a strong, dense fabric

capital intensive: requiring the investment of large sums of money in relation to output

carriage: the cost of conveying goods or passengers from one place to another

circulating capital: (sometimes called 'working capital') investment that is continually used and replenished in ongoing operations, for example raw material stock

disinvestment: when merchants stop taking part in a business activity and instead sell up and withdraw money from their enterprise

elasticity of demand: the extent to which demand for goods will increase if the price falls, or decrease if the price rises

fixed capital: the investment needed to start up and maintain a business, for example the tools and buildings

fulled (or fulling): a stage in clothmaking when the newly woven cloth is pounded and washed to eliminate oils, dirt and other impurities, and to bind the fibres together, making the fabric thicker

labour intensive: needing a large workforce or a large amount of work in relation to output

leading sector: the most important or advanced area (or sector) of an economy

Levant: the countries and islands of the eastern Mediterranean

merchant adventurers: early modern merchants who established foreign trading stations and carried on business ventures abroad

‘nap was raised and sheared’: the uneven, fuzzy surface of the cloth was brushed and then trimmed to give a smooth finish

nascent: just coming into existence

partible inheritance: a system whereby all children, or in some cases all sons, receive a share of an estate on the death of their parents

pastoral areas: areas where much of the land is used for the raising of sheep, cattle or other grazing animals

piece rate: wages based on the amount that an employee produces; for example, early modern weavers were paid a fixed rate for each piece of cloth they wove

Discussion

The main points I noted were:

- There were few major technical innovations in early modern industry, although it could and did diversify (for example in the production of new kinds of textiles), and some sectors (such as coal and iron) grew

substantially. Some fairly small-scale new industries also emerged, such as salt-making.

- Most industry was small in scale, and located in the countryside. Production was scattered, in people's homes rather than concentrated in particular locations, but quite large numbers worked for a single employer through the putting-out system, and their employers then exported the finished cloth over long distances. Industrial communities grew in size – coalmining areas, for instance, attracted new migrants. As more people worked in industry, they became less self-sufficient, buying rather than growing foodstuffs.
 - Industry tended to be located where there was labour available, as this was the most expensive input to production. So merchants would ship wool to areas where there was under-employment in agriculture. Agricultural workers might therefore have two or even three jobs to fill up their time.
 - Markets were driven by demand and varied with changes in fashion or even political conflicts. The centre of trading shifted from Italy to northern Europe, where goods were imported from across the world, helping to create a new consumer society.
 - The diversification of industry led to changes in the social structure and the emergence of communities where labourers experienced higher levels of insecurity; as a result there was discontent and riots.
-

We've seen, then, that there were a number of different developments and trends occurring in the early modern European economy as a whole. One thing which the passage you read in exercise 15.1 didn't have much to say about was the way that this worked in particular geographical areas. So the next reading I'd like to you to look at focuses on Germany. It also brings up the question of the various ways that production was organised. Where were things made before the introduction of the factory?

Online session 15.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 15.1. This should take around 30 minutes.

15.2 Structural factors

So far we have looked at some of the features of, and broad trends in, early modern industry. Among others, two factors played a vital role: transport and energy.

Transport

Transport had a great deal of influence on the economy. If we take France as an example, we can see that despite some improvements in the later seventeenth century, the country's internal transport network remained poor. Sea transport was much quicker and cheaper than moving goods over land. Many rivers were navigable, but only in the winter months when they were in flood. Combined with the fact that roads were often impassable in winter, this meant that it often took months for goods to travel over a country the size of France. In the second half of the seventeenth century King Louis XIV (1638–1715, reigned 1643–1715) adopted a series of measures to boost the wealth of his country, and therefore his own revenues (Wiesner-Hanks, 2013, p. 330). Among other initiatives, he subsidised the textile and shipbuilding industries and encouraged the establishment of trade companies. A major supporter of these policies was the controller-general of finances, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619–1683). His aim was to develop French industry and to improve the country's financial position by reducing the reliance on imports and maximising its exports. Thus he increased import duties and tolls on foreign goods. This kind of economic policy came to be known as **mercantilism**. Although Colbert was largely unsuccessful in his attempts to reduce internal tolls within France's different regions, he identified transport as an area for intervention. His plans included making more rivers navigable and building more canals: the most expensive of these was a canal to connect the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. It was built in the 1670s and, when finished, it cost the state a massive 13.5 million livres, at a time when the state's annual peacetime revenue was around 70 million livres (Cole, 1964, pp. 341, 380–2). France was ahead of nearly all the rest of Europe in inland transport: it took until the late eighteenth century before any inland canals were built in Britain.

Although Colbert was genuinely keen to foster trade and industry in France, his major preoccupation was supporting Louis XIV's wars on the country's north-eastern frontier, an area with a relatively strong economy. As a result, France's road network in the north was very good, but that in the west and south of the country remained very sparse. Roads could not support large carts, and they were so far apart that in any case the only means of land transport which could reach most French consumers was the pack mule, which needed to be fed and watered and could carry only about 60 kilograms (Price, 1981, p. 3).



Figure 15.1 Aert van der Neer, *A Frozen River near a Village, with Golfers and Skaters*, c.1648, oil on canvas, 40 x 53 cm. The National Gallery, London. Photo: National Gallery.



Figure 15.2 Isack van Ostade, *A Landscape with Peasants and a Cart*, 1645, oil on oak, 53 x 45 cm. The National Gallery, London. Photo: National Gallery.

The paintings reproduced in Figures 15.1 and 15.2 are both artistic representations of scenes. Creative conventions will have been followed – for example the composition of the crowd scene on the ice in Figure 15.1 is unlikely to be realistic – but nevertheless these paintings allow us to note that rivers froze, and that realistic representations of roads, as in Figure 15.2, showed them to be rutted.

Transport was not only slow and unreliable, it was also very expensive. Economic historians have calculated the energy costs of transport by looking at the amount of food – either for humans or for animals –

ultimately needed by different modes of transport. To move 1,000 kg (1 tonne) of anything 1 kilometre overland using human porters required the energy from 8.6 kg of grain; by pack animal it required 4.1 kg; by cart, 3.4 kg; by river, about 1 kg; and by sea, 0.3–0.4 kg (Kander et al., 2013, p. 74). Thus the only goods which were worth transporting long distances over land were relatively light essential supplies, such as salt, or luxury goods of various kinds. It was worthwhile carrying these over long distances because the profit that their sale would generate was enough to cover the high costs of transport. Thus many goods – for instance most food, agricultural tools, household goods and everyday furniture – were nearly always produced locally, because they were too expensive to transport on a large scale.

Across Europe, almost everyone had a nearby miller for grinding their grain, since very few people could afford to transport bread any distance. Similarly, nearly every village had a blacksmith who made and mended farm implements. Because most products were only traded locally, for most consumer goods there was little incentive for producers to specialise in a particular form of manufacturing. By investing money to improve the efficiency of production, they could lower the production costs, but high transport costs would remain. Overall, the price to the consumer would not decrease enough to make the product more popular and thus make the investment worthwhile (Kander et al., 2013, p. 73). So producers tended to be conservative and reluctant to change their ways. The predominantly local nature of economic relations strengthened the importance of community ties.

Energy

The second important factor for the early modern economy was energy. Sources of power for transport and manufacturing were very limited. In 2000 the average western European used 76 gigajoules of power a year; in the sixteenth century they used about a quarter of that (Kander et al., 2013, pp. 37–9). There were a range of sources of energy available in early modern Europe, which contributed varying amounts of total power to production. Wood was the main source. Some was used for industrial processes, but most of it was used for domestic heating and cooking. The mechanical power generated by animals and by people was mostly put to use in agriculture and the production of food. Table 15.1 gives estimates of how Europe was

powered: note how important draught animals were, compared with human power.

Table 15.1 Estimates of power available in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century

Source	Number	Power in horsepower
Wood	-	10,000,000
Oxen	24 million	6,000,000
Horses	14 million	3,500,000
Manpower	50 million	900,000
Sails	-	230,000
Total	-	20,630,000

Source: Adapted from Braudel, 1974 [1967], p. 274; Kander et al., 2013, p. 50

In 1500 most of the economic effort went into keeping people alive – there wasn't much left over for the production of consumer goods. As Hindle noted in the extract from the set book you read in exercise 15.1, economic activity became a little more efficient over the next 250 years, so a higher proportion of the population became involved in non-agricultural employment. But the increasing amount of available manpower did not solve the other problem with Europe's energy sources: they were diffuse. Wood needs to be harvested from a large area and then transported. To stay warm in a northern European winter, a city of 10,000 people needed wood from an area of 10,000 hectares carried in daily in 30–50 carts, whose animals needed to be fed (Kander et al., 2013, p. 58). Only in England was coal used on a large scale, overtaking the use of wood around 1620. Coal was mainly burned for domestic heating, and its popularity relied on the fact that the supply (from mines in the north-east of England) and the main demand (from London) could be easily connected by cheap sea transport (Kander et al., 2013, pp. 57, 61). Like London, Amsterdam also grew large by burning a fossil fuel; in this case, locally mined peat.

Mechanical energy was also hard to concentrate. Draught animals generate power, but they require a large land area to be devoted to providing their fodder. Water or wind power could be used to generate mechanical power. The continuous output of a watermill was equivalent to that of around 80 people or 8 horses. By modern western standards (or those of the stationary steam engines of the nineteenth

century) this isn't very much, but it was enough for many industrial processes. But there were only a limited number of places watermills could be sited, and if large numbers of mills were concentrated in a particular area they suffered from shortages of water, which meant they could not be used continuously.

Other factors affecting industry

Transport and energy sources imposed limits on industry, but they were not the only factors shaping where production took place and the success of industrial ventures. In the case studies that follow, four further factors played a part:

- *Ecology and landscape.* Nearly all early modern industry was dependent on being in a particular place, reliant on geological or biological resources and on access to transport links such as rivers to move finished products.
- *Markets and politics.* This factor involves the effects of the human environment. Early modern manufacturing often relied on state support or a peculiar configuration of circumstances. Changes here could spark renewed activity or precipitate decline.
- *Technology.* As you saw in the exercise at the start of this chapter, there was no major technological breakthrough that changed processes of production in the early modern period. Yet technology was required, especially for some activities, and it is important to appreciate what skills and expertise were necessary and how they were applied.
- *Investment.* Even small-scale industrial production required some sort of equipment. Large-scale production could demand complex and expensive machinery, and was possible only if one or more people were willing to fund its purchase and maintenance.

As you read through the case studies, think about the sources through which we can learn about manufacturing. Unlike political or religious history, which was sometimes consciously chronicled with a view to long-term survival of the primary sources, economic history usually has to be pieced together from a variety of sources, including archaeology, printed sources and archives.

15.3 Case study 1: Silver-mining in southern Germany

In his classic economic history book *Capitalism and Material Life*, French historian Fernand Braudel noted that gold and silver might have had an impact on technology out of all proportion to their total value, because the concentration of wealth that they represented made it worthwhile to expend a great deal of ingenuity in extracting them.

These metals gave rise to speculative enterprises with which proletarian iron was never concerned. A wealth of ingenuity was expended in the quest for silver – witness the beautiful diagrams in Agricola's book on mines, or the pits and galleries of Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines in the Vosges [in eastern France]; it was for silver that the valuable deposits of mercury in Almaden in Spain were worked ... for silver that mining progress (galleries, pumping out of water, ventilation) was accomplished.

(Braudel, 1974 [1967], p. 283)

The mining of silver, in particular, was subject to competition from cheap sources of supply in (Spanish-ruled) Mexico which began to arrive in Europe in the mid-sixteenth century. This was one of the most important economic consequences of colonial expansion. It meant that European mines, threatened by cheap competition, had to adopt the most advanced techniques to remain profitable. Thus mining for metals was probably the most technologically advanced large-scale industry in the early modern period. This case study will introduce you to a unique historical primary source which allows us to learn much about early modern mining practice: *De re metallica* ('On the nature of metals') by Georgius Agricola (1494–1555), which was published posthumously in 1556.

Agricola was a university-educated German doctor and a loyal subject of the Protestant Duke of Saxony (1521–1553), who appointed him burgomaster of Chemnitz and sent him on diplomatic missions. Despite this, Agricola remained a dedicated and unrepentant Catholic in his personal life. His book was the result of research carried out in Joachimsthal and Chemnitz, both centres of the mining industry, between the 1520s and the 1540s. (The locations of these and other

place names mentioned in this chapter are shown in Figure 15.3.) Agricola was his pen-name, as he had been christened Georg Pawer ('Bauer' in modern German): it is a direct translation of his surname (which means 'farmer' in German) into Latin. His book was written in Latin, though it was quickly translated into German in 1557. Latin was the language of the Catholic Church and the educated elite and so it was also the closest thing that Europe had to an international language. It's unlikely that any miners would have been able to read Latin, so this raises the question: for whom did Agricola write? On the one hand, he may have been addressing the men who owned mines rather than those who worked in them. His work, though, includes a large number of references to classical (ancient Greek and Latin) scholars and so, on the other hand, it may well have also been intended as an academic record of the mining industry. As a humanist, he was interested in appraising how the ancients had discussed questions about mining.

Agricola's work covers every aspect of mining. He deals with the way that mining should be organised in the second volume of *De re metallica*.

Exercise 15.2

Now turn to Reading 15.1, Agricola, 'From *De re metallica*, Book II', located at the end of the chapter. Who do you think Agricola is addressing here?

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

Agricola is clearly talking to potential investors in mines, as he describes the practice of reducing risk by having a spread of different investments.



Figure 15.3 Map of early modern Europe. Photo: Open University. Note that the borders and coastlines used in this map are taken from the present day.

Pamela Long has shown that risk – and, more broadly in the early modern period, concern about risk – was not unique to mining (Long, 2003, p. 100). In fact, this concern was the basis of much agriculture as well, particularly in southern Europe. Peasant farmers preferred to cultivate a variety of crops, in a variety of different locations, so that if one crop failed they would still have the benefit of the others. The downside of this practice, of course, was that a bumper year for one crop would produce only limited returns. The practice of spreading the risk was prominent in long-distance trade too: most merchants would not put all their available capital in one ship or commodity, but spread it between several ventures. Thus the total loss of a ship or a consignment – which happened relatively often – would not ruin them (Ash, 2004, pp. 9, 107).

This kind of behaviour illustrates one very important characteristic of the early modern economy which has been noted by the historian Peter Musgrave: the great deal of attention paid to the reduction of risk. External factors such as harvest failure, changing state policies, and the opening and closing of far-off markets and trade routes all made complex economic activity very risky. Failure was an ever-present possibility and, given the absence of a safety net for most peasants, artisans and traders, harvest failure or business failure could mean destitution and death. As a reaction to this situation, people in early modern Europe rarely invested heavily in one means of making a living if they could avoid this (Musgrave, 1999, p 56). There were exceptions to this general rule in the agricultural sphere. Particularly in northern Europe, where conditions made it harder to mix different crops, farmers increasingly specialised. Nevertheless, this kind of risk avoidance remained dominant throughout our period.

So Agricola's work provides a very concrete example of how people reacted to risk. It also allows us to examine the role of technology and expertise in early modern economic activities. *De re metallica* describes the work of expert miners; however, they tended to keep their lucrative skills to themselves, passing them on only to offspring or apprentices. This was a feature common to all crafts, which tended to keep their skills secret: the system of apprenticeship was a way of controlling the

transmission of valuable knowledge. The extent to which the mining of metals was a German monopoly is illustrated by an episode which took place in the 1560s when an English syndicate attempted to use German miners to obtain copper in Cumbria. The English investors were continually worried that their German workforce was trying to dupe them, but knew that no English person had the expertise to understand whether the Germans' reports were correct or not. The mining attempt was a technical success but a commercial failure. The German–English interactions also reveal the limitations of Agricola's work as a technical handbook. The English agent at the mine noted that one potential investor was reading and citing Agricola, 'but lacking experienced knowledge by daily working, Georgius Agricola is a present medicine to make a heavy purse light' – in other words it was a waste of money (Ash, 2004, p. 53). So while Agricola's work could be taken to the mines and used as an authoritative source, this observation reveals some scepticism as to its utility: it was not detailed enough to serve readers who did not also have the necessary hands-on experience.

There were many difficulties in setting up mining operations. Agricola refers to 'the miner' as the main subject of his book, but he means someone who had money to invest and was in a position to choose where to invest it. This investor would hire 'workmen' to carry out the actual labour. These were free labourers, not serfs: we know this because Agricola points out that if a mine were somewhere remote from a food-producing district, the skilled workers would baulk at the cost of food and leave to work elsewhere. Another potential problem was the attitude of the local ruler or seigneur; they had the ability to influence mining operations, for good or ill, by supporting a venture or by taxing or even seizing the precious metal found on their territory.

Agricola writes:

The miner should not start mining operations in a district which is oppressed by a tyrant ... If he be inimical the mine will be rendered unsafe through hostile attacks, in one of which all of the gold or silver, or other mineral products, laboriously collected with much cost, will be taken away from the owner.

(Agricola, 1950, p. 32)

This was no idle worry: one problem the German miners in Cumbria faced was attacks by locals, who were protected by their local magnate, Lady Radcliffe (Ash, 2004, p. 42). Local settled communities did not necessarily welcome the arrival of industry, particularly if the main beneficiaries were elsewhere. We can see therefore that Agricola's work describes the political and social context of mining as well as its technical side.

De re metallica is peppered with illustrations. The woodcut images in Agricola's work derive from drawings made in Joachimsthal in the early 1550s. What can these images tell us about the work of mining in sixteenth-century Europe? Consider Figure 15.4, which shows workers sieving ore. Although all the underground working shown in the book features only men, this image shows a man, a woman and a boy working together. We should not interpret the images in the book as snapshots, but the illustration certainly suggests that in some mines, families worked together as an economic unit.

Transporting ore and pumping water are good examples of the kinds of complex technology described by Agricola – and can also tell us about the purpose of *De re metallica*, which was to attempt to offer a technical explanation of how all the various processes and mechanisms needed for a mining operation worked.



Figure 15.4 Georgius Agricola, illustration of workers sieving ore, from *De re metallica libri XII. Quibus officia, instrumenta, machinae, ac omnia denique ad metallicam spectantia, non modo luculentissime describuntur, sed et per effigies ...* Published 1556 by H. Froben & N. Bischoff, Basel. The Wellcome Library, London. Photo: Image produced by ProQuest as part of *Early English Books*: www.proquest.com. Key: A—Sieve. B—Its handles. C—Tub. D—Bottom of sieve made of iron wires. E—Hoop. F—Rods. G—Hoops. H—Woman shaking the sieve. I—Boy supplying it with material which requires washing. K—Man with shovel removing from the tub the material which has passed through the sieve. Key in English from H. Hoover and L. H. Hoover (1912), *Georgius Agricola, De re metallica* (translated from the first Latin edition of 1556), London, The Mining Magazine.

Exercise 15.3

Study Figures 15.5, 15.6 and 15.7 and look for the elements that are identified in the captions. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Are the illustrations realistic?
- How are the elements of the drawings arranged?
- How useful do you think the illustrations were for a reader unfamiliar with mining?

This should take around 30 minutes.

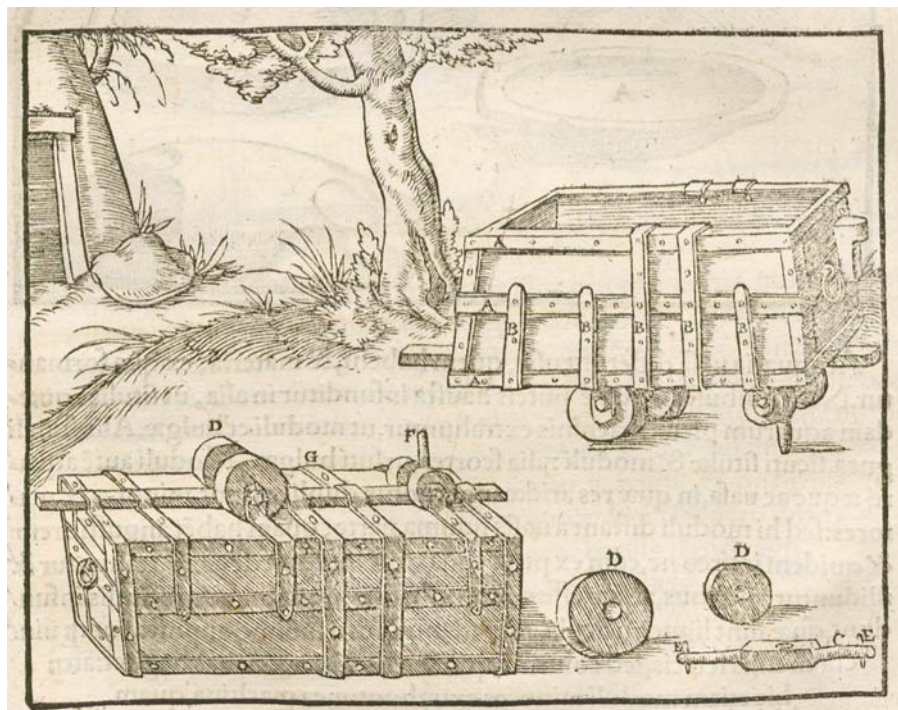


Figure 15.5 Georgius Agricola, illustration of a hand truck, from *De re metallica libri XII. Quibus officia, instrumenta, machinae, ac omnia denique ad metallicam spectantia, non modo luculentissime describuntur, sed et per effigies ...* Published 1556 by H. Froben & N. Bischoff, Basel. The Wellcome Library, London. Photo: Image produced by ProQuest as part of *Early English Books*: www.proquest.com. Key: A—Rectangular iron bands on truck. B—Its iron straps. C—Iron axle. D—Wooden rollers. E—Small iron keys. F—Large blunt iron pin. G—Same truck upside down. Key in English from H. Hoover and L. H. Hoover (1912), *Georgius Agricola, De re metallica* (translated from the first Latin edition of 1556), London, The Mining Magazine.

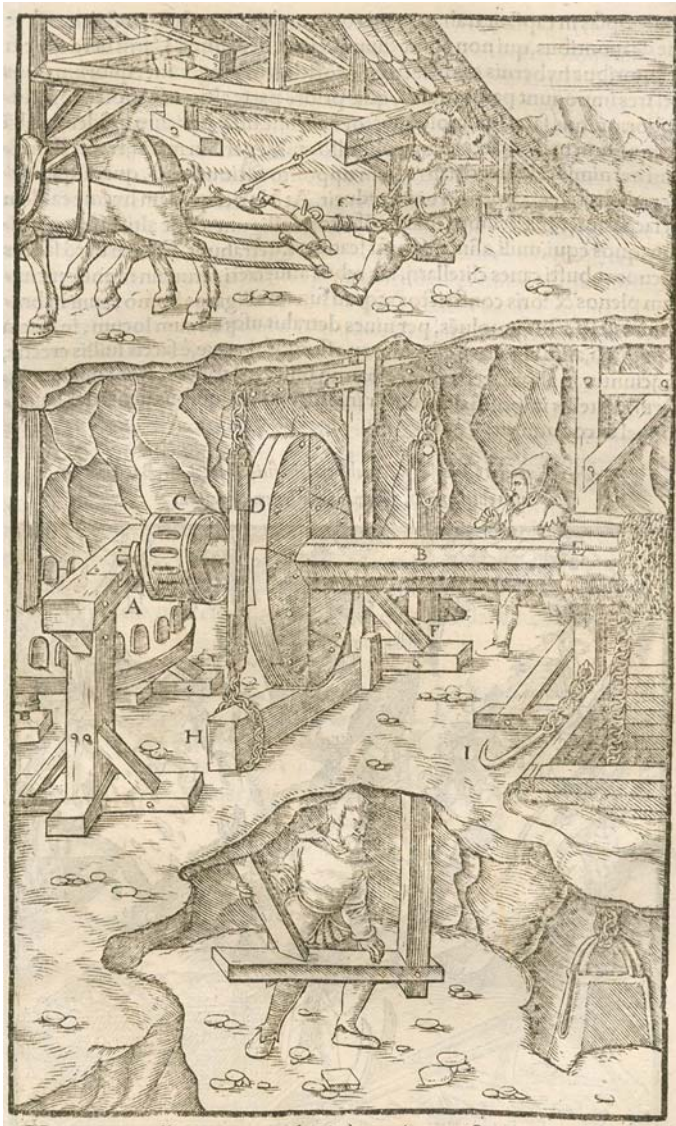


Figure 15.6 Georgius Agricola, illustration of a horse gin, from *De re metallica libri XII. Quibus officia, instrumenta, machinae, ac omnia denique ad metallicam spectantia, non modo luculentissime describuntur, sed et per effigies ...* Published 1556 by H. Froben & N. Bischoff, Basel. The Wellcome Library, London. Photo: Image produced by ProQuest as part of Early English Books: www.proquest.com. Key: A—Toothed drum which is on the upright axle. B—Horizontal axle. C—Drum which is made of rundles. D—Wheel near it. E—Drum made of hubs. F—Brake. G—Oscillating beam. H—Short beam. I—Hook. Key in English from H. Hoover and L. H. Hoover (1912), *Georgius Agricola, De re metallica* (translated from the first Latin edition of 1556), London, The Mining Magazine.

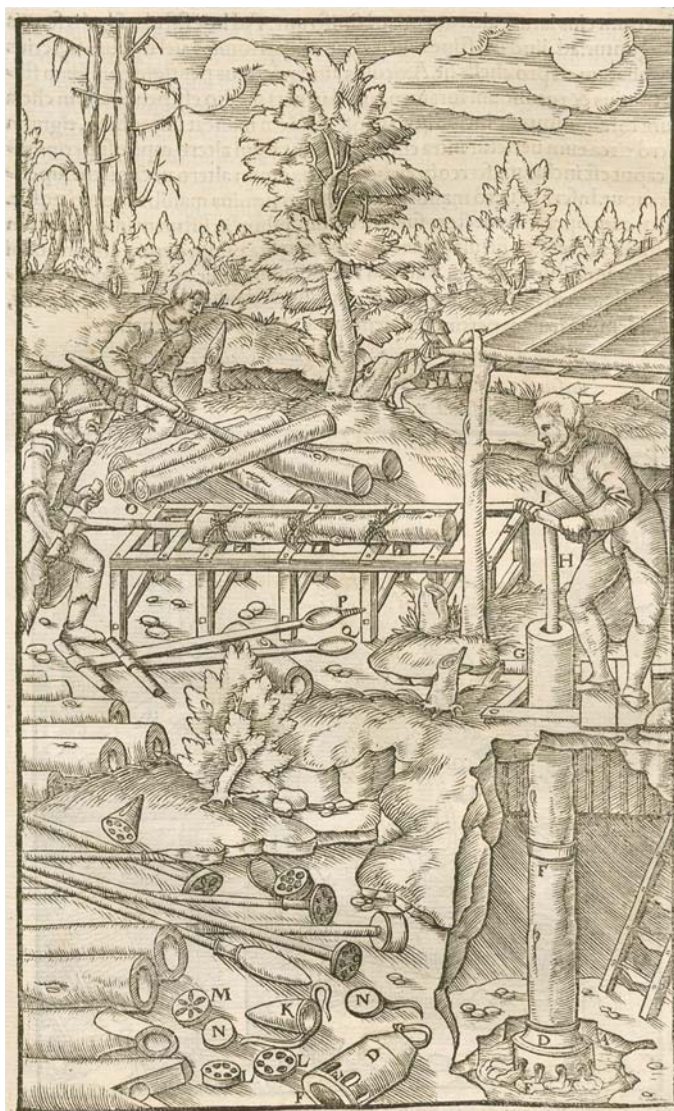


Figure 15.7 Georgius Agricola, illustration of a boring-out pump, from *De re metallica libri XII. Quibus officia, instrumenta, machinae, ac omnia denique ad metallicam spectantia, non modo luculentissime describuntur, sed et per effigies ...* Published 1556 by H. Froben & N. Bischoff, Basel. The Wellcome Library, London. Photo: Image produced by ProQuest as part of Early English Books: www.proquest.com. Key: A—Sump. B—Pipes. C—Flooring. D—Trunk. E—Perforations of trunk. F—Valve. G—Spout. H—Piston-rod. I—Hand-bar of piston. K—Shoe. L—Disc with round openings. M—Disc with oval openings. N—Cover. O—This man is boring logs and making them into pipes. P—Borer with auger. Q—Wider borer. Key in English from H. Hoover and L. H. Hoover (1912), *Georgius Agricola, De re metallica* (translated from the first Latin edition of 1556), London, The Mining Magazine.

Discussion

- The drawings clearly are not realistic: sometimes they show both the surface and equipment underground – so they are more like diagrams than representations of what an observer would have seen at a mine. The artist has tried to show the equipment very clearly.
- In Figure 15.5 you may have noted element F, a pin. The truck for carrying ore from mines has a pin protruding from it: the text confirms that this is to keep the truck on the wooden tracks. This is one of the first examples of a railed vehicle.
- Figure 15.6 shows a horse gin in action on the surface, powering a lift for raising water from within the mine. The lift can be controlled by an operator underground. In this figure in particular we can see the pump components scattered in the foreground.
- Figure 15.7 shows both the operation of a simple hand pump, and the process of boring out tree trunks to make hollow pipes for pumping out water.
- These illustrations are clearly intended to give the reader an idea of what mining equipment looked like. In this respect, the book functioned as an instruction manual. However, we know that in the case of the new mine in England, having a copy of Agricola did not help investors to understand all that was happening, so the drawings were of limited value.

Figures 15.5–7 can tell us much about the operation of mines, but they are most informative, and were studied, in concert with the text. One of the most serious obstacles to mining was the underground water that could flood the mine. The figure in Reading 15.2 shows a pump for draining water.

Exercise 15.4

Turn to Reading 15.2, Agricola, 'From *De re metallica*, Book VI', located at the end of the chapter. You will need to study the image as well as the text to work out what's going on, and you may need to read the text very closely.

Then try to answer the following questions:

- What can we discover from this reading about the way that mines were worked? (Think in particular of the organisation of labour.)

- How does the image help us to understand the text? How would you describe the language used by Agricola?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

- Clearly, flooding was a real problem for miners: they used very complex (and therefore expensive) machinery to deal with this. In some places, they used multiple pumps to drain a mine. From the comments about the horses working in four teams, for four hours at a time, we can work out that the pump could be run continuously. This implies that at least some workers – those in charge of the pump, but perhaps also the miners – must have worked in shifts. Contrast this with what you learned about everyday life in Chapter 5: most people's working days were structured by sunrise and sunset.
 - The image is very helpful as it allows us to see how the various elements described in the text fit together. (Equally, the text helps us by giving a lot of detail about the size of the different parts.) The language is precise; accurate measures are given of the size of the various components of the machine and the steps necessary to build it are clearly explained. The information also describes different kinds of pump and where they are used. This is a comprehensive approach to the problem of draining water.
-

What Agricola's work tells us is that in the sixteenth century the silver-mining industry was based on a complex social structure, as follows. Its investors had a reasonably sophisticated way of backing new ventures which would lower their risk. However, their activities remained at the whim of the local lord, particularly in the very small German states – these lords could levy extra taxes, unilaterally change laws, or deprive miners of the protection of the law. Skilled workers in this industry were in demand, and their employers knew that they needed to pay them adequately to keep them. Labour in the mining industry was carried out by family groups as well as by individuals. There is no sense of investors having an idea of themselves as a class, or organising as an interest group.

The mining industry also enjoyed a high degree of technical sophistication; we can see Agricola's attempt to resolve the problem of flooding water with purpose-built machines as technical innovation of a

kind. His text is also evidence that, despite the guilds' protection of specific know-how, some dissemination of technical knowledge took place. Overall, this case study provides support for Braudel's contention that the technology of early modern mining was driven by the demand for precious metals, because only these were valuable enough to justify such effort.

15.4 Case study 2: The iron industry of the Weald

This case study takes you to Britain, and more specifically to an area of south England where iron had been worked for many centuries. Iron was a material required in a wide range of activities and its extraction was linked to metal manufacture. As you will see, however, the economy surrounding metalwork was strongly affected by broader political and economic trends. Economic growth and contraction were the consequences of factors well beyond the boundaries of an area and its communities. As you work through this section, keep in mind the issues listed at the end of section 15.2: ecology and landscape, markets and politics, technology, and investment.

Online session 15.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 15.2. This should take around 40 minutes.

As you saw in online session 15.2, iron had been worked in the Weald since pre-Roman times, but the technology that arrived in the fourteenth century was the blast furnace, which for the first time allowed the production of liquid iron. The furnace was introduced by skilled workmen from over the Channel, from the Pays de Bray, inland from Dieppe in France: a geologically similar area to the Weald. None of the Weald's furnaces survive intact, but Figure 15.8 shows the remains of a similar one in Yorkshire. Some of the iron was cast directly from the furnaces into **cast-iron** items such as guns, but most of it was reworked into **wrought iron** in other specialised workshops called 'finery forges'. These used water-powered hammers and hearths (burning charcoal) to work the iron into wrought-iron bars, which were then traded to other parts of England, where blacksmiths would use them as their basic raw material for all sorts of locally produced items.

Ironmasters bought the raw materials, built the furnaces and hammers, and paid the skilled workers. Many early ironmasters were people who owned land in the area and who often made the initial investments. By the end of the sixteenth century, though, the furnaces and forges were

largely being worked by specialist ironmasters, who leased the property and the right to run it from the landowners. They formed a relatively wealthy class in the Weald.



Figure 15.8 The Rockley blast furnace, 1652. Worsbrough Mill Museum and Country Park, Yorkshire. Photo: © Bill Wymar/Alamy Stock Photo. This is the oldest surviving remains of a blast furnace in Britain. Furnaces in the Weald followed this pattern.

Which sources can we use to find out more about the history of the Wealden iron? A valuable written primary source is a series of lists created in 1574 of all the furnaces and forges in the area. This was not constructed out of curiosity, but because the **Privy Council** was worried that ironfounders were prepared to sell guns to England's enemies, and wanted to threaten them with a £2,000 fine if they were caught doing that. Thus lists were drawn up of all the owners and proprietors of the area's furnaces and forges (Teesdale, 1986, p. 8). This shows that there were six furnaces in the parish of Mayfield, for example.

Exercise 15.5

Turn to Reading 15.3, Edmund Teesdale, 'The 1574 lists of ironworks in the Weald', 1986, located at the end of the chapter. This is an extract from a long table, so needs to be read accordingly.

At first glance this looks like an unpromising source, but study it and think about what it can tell us about the men who were engaged in ironworking.

This should take around 10 minutes.

Discussion

From this, I learned that ironmasters ran a mixture of operations: some had furnaces where iron was smelted; others had forges; still others were involved in both parts of the operation. Some owned their own works; others rented them from another proprietor.

Some were quite major operators, with a range of facilities; others had just one operation. Ironmasters did not always live in the same place that their furnaces were located, so they were possibly not on site on a daily basis.

Early modern governments did not have any commitment to free trade and it was government intervention as much as competition that had the biggest impact on the Weald's fortunes. European states had 'arsenals' – places for the storage of arms – but the actual manufacture of weapons was spread out over a wide area (Braudel, 1974 [1967], p. 292). One reason that the Weald was favoured by the English government as a source for guns was its relatively close proximity to London and to naval and artillery bases. Government policy was to try to nurture national industries such as ironfounding, but this did not always work in the long term. The Weald suffered from the effects of the government's well-intended efforts to protect its source of guns. In the early seventeenth century, concerns that English iron was being sold abroad led to the government placing an embargo on its export in 1619. This helped to boost the growth of a competing iron industry in Sweden, which exported across Europe. So while the ironmasters of the Weald enjoyed a protected market for their guns, the Swedish industry specialised in making cheap wrought iron for domestic and industrial use. The rapid growth of Swedish ironmaking can be seen in

estimates of the extent of the European iron industry. In Table 15.2, note how Swedish production took off between 1600 and 1700, during the ban on English exports.

Table 15.2 Iron output in western Europe (thousands of tonnes)

Year	Total per capita	Great Britain	Sweden	France	Germany
1500	0.65	1	5	12	5
1600	1.6	17	7	–	–
1700	2.0	24	28	25	30
1740–50	1.5–1.9	27	40	–	–
1790	2.2	80	59	140	50

Source: van Zanden, 2001, p. 83

Government policy left the Wealden industry dependent on orders from the English government, but during the English civil wars the market was disrupted. The Parliamentary army controlled the Weald, so the royalist side had to find guns from other parts of the country. Iron production in the West Midlands and the Forest of Dean was boosted as a result (Edwards, 2000, p. 98). The economic trajectory of the Weald, therefore, shows how important government action was in causing growth and contraction in early modern industry. Governments were much more concerned with short-term political gain than long-term economic growth.

There is controversy over the precise reasons for the ultimate decline of the Weald. Some writers have argued that the Wealden iron industry eventually failed because it had exhausted the charcoal reserves nearby: it was ended by the failure of its ecological niche (Parry, 2013). This is quite possible, as deforestation in Europe ended many charcoal-based industries. However, it was not inevitable: by the sixteenth century ironmasters were no longer cutting down the forests, but were using effective woodland management techniques such as **coppicing** to keep their use of the land at sustainable levels. Supplying timber for furnaces dominated land use in the Weald, but did not exhaust it. The actual explanation is more complex. Charcoal needed to be collected from a wide area and, as we have seen, early modern transport costs were high; transport in the Weald was difficult. Coal was a more geographically concentrated energy source, but until the early eighteenth century nobody had worked out how to use it to smelt iron:

coal had too many impurities for this to work. Around 1700, ironworkers in Shropshire discovered how to do this (by first heating the coal to make coke, which like charcoal is pure carbon) and they rapidly developed a market in cheap iron goods such as pots, which undercut products from the Weald. The final blow to the Weald's industry came at the end of the eighteenth century, when a foundry in Scotland developed a method of using iron produced with coke to cast guns (Hodgkinson, 2008, p. 87).

The economic historian Maxine Berg brings the owners of the industry – the ironmasters and investors – into the explanation. She notes that 'As each individual industry declined, mercantile metropolitan capital switched not into the region's agriculture or even any other activity, but into foreign investment and government stock' (Berg, 2005, p. 113). Thus the Weald's position was eroded because it lacked a comparative advantage over rival producers: makers of guns first in Sweden and then in Scotland, and makers of cheaper iron goods in Shropshire. The owners were not willing to reinvest their money in other industrial processes locally, and thus the area ended up de-industrialising.

The history of ironfounding in the Weald graphically illustrates the importance of a range of factors in determining the success and failure of local industries. The iron industry here flourished because the area had good resources – iron ore, water and wood – as well as investors willing to bring money and expertise to build and run furnaces and forges. It had a good market for its products: at a time when wars were frequent, governments had to buy guns for their army and navy. But, over time, these advantages turned into disadvantages. The Weald was not well situated to switch over to the use of coal rather than wood. Investors were not willing to reinvest in new technologies, and the guaranteed market supplying guns allowed other manufacturers to dominate the market in iron for domestic and other manufactures. Ecology, investment and markets combined in complex ways to bring ironmaking to an end.

Written sources like Reading 15.3, which you looked at in exercise 15.5, are not the only resources through which historians can reconstruct the economic and social history of the Weald. Archaeological sources can be extremely useful too, even where much of the original structure of a furnace has disappeared. This is best illustrated by exploring a work which brings both types of source together. The author of the extract in online session 15.3 excavated a furnace at Panningridge in Sussex which was relatively well documented.

Online session 15.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 15.3. This should take around 30 minutes.

15.5 Case study 3: Clothing

So far in the chapter you have thought mainly about the processes of production and therefore the supply side of the economy. However, to make sense of early modern production it's also necessary to bring in the nature of demand. One area where this is particularly evident is textile manufacture, and in what follows you will examine (among other things) the role played by fashion in changing this industry.

Clothes remain a necessity of life, but early modern items of clothing were far more valuable than their modern western counterparts because so much labour was needed to make them. As you have learned from the chapter in the set book by Hindle you analysed in exercise 15.1, and seen in the films on Leiden in the chapter 'Urban communities' (Chapter 10), several steps were necessary. First, the raw material – cotton, flax (the plant whose fibres are used to make linen fabric) or wool – had to be obtained and processed; then it had to be spun into thread and finally woven into cloth. This cloth was then subject to other processes such as fulling or dyeing before it was used to make garments, as Figure 15.9 shows. All this labour needed to be paid for in some way. Peasants making their own clothes had to take time away from growing food; textile workers needed to be recompensed enough for their labour in order to buy food.

The way that people's need for clothing was expressed changed during our period. Most peasant garments did not alter very much in composition or design. These items were produced and traded locally. But wealthy people and, increasingly, those of the middling sort expected to have more sophisticated garments, made from better-quality cloth and decorated. They also expected these clothes to reflect current fashion, and would buy new clothes or have old garments made over to ensure they kept up with new trends. Fashion meant that the nature of the textiles produced changed over the years. New fabrics such as silk and cotton, often traded over long distances, displaced and supplanted locally made woollens and linen. The growing demand for lighter materials (the so-called 'new draperies') generated a crisis in the English textile industry, which traditionally produced heavier fabric.



Figure 15.9 Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg, *The Spinning, Cutting of the Warp and Weaving*, 1594, oil on panel, 138 x 196 cm. Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, Netherlands. Photo: © Peter Horree/Alamy Stock Photo. Be aware that this is a posed and composed picture: it is unlikely that actual weavers would have worked in such inconvenient proximity, or been dressed nearly as well. Nevertheless, it allows us to imagine what the machines they used would have looked like.

There were other institutional influences on patterns of production which owed little to markets and competition in production. One was intervention by the state or by local merchants or nobles, who sometimes took the initiative in converting small-scale production to a larger rural industrial system and encouraging local markets. They did this because subsistence economies – where peasants produce purely for their own consumption – made it very difficult for landlords to extract rents and for governments to extract taxes. Peasants who rented small areas of land were unable to grow much surplus food which could be sold, and hence were not able to pay much in the way of rent. Thus it was in landlords' interests to bring these peasants into the money economy, encouraging them to spend some of their time producing a surplus manufactured product which could be sold. The peasants would then be able to pay higher rents out of a proportion of their profits. Even if this did not generate much in the way of rent

revenue, it meant that the inhabitants would be less likely to need to rely on poor relief in the future. This can be illustrated by looking at the growth of the flax industry in Ireland, as you will do in the second part of online session 15.4.

Online session 15.4

Now go to the module website and complete online session 15.4. This should take around 50 minutes.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked closely at three kinds of industry: the mining of precious metals, ironfounding and textile production. Other industries were of course also present in early modern Europe and they too changed over the period, often supplying consumer goods which were not widely available in earlier periods. As J. L. van Zanden sums it up, these included:

printing, paper making, sugar refining, the tobacco industry, the silk industry, the cotton industry, diamond cutting, and the distilling of gin. The supply of industrial products at the end of the eighteenth century was much richer than at the beginning of the sixteenth century, due to the rise of all sorts of new industries which swelled the market with new products – from coffee, tobacco and sugar to carriages, musical instruments and wigs. At the same time, shipbuilding and other maritime industries –from anchor smiths to rope makers – must have profited from the huge growth of the international merchant fleet.

(van Zanden, 2001, p. 81)

As well as new industry arriving, existing industry grew slowly over the period. But there was no equivalent of the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution. In early modern Europe, diffuse energy sources and expensive transport meant that most economic activity was necessarily local. Investment in new production or transport was as much about political or social imperatives as it was about economic ones. Competition was one reason why industries grew or contracted, but state policy and shifts in markets (sometimes driven by fashion) were also important. The most efficient producers were not always the ones who flourished, because most people involved in industry did not want to maximise output but to minimise risk (Musgrave, 1999, p. 155). A complex range of factors – resources, technology, skills, investment – had to come together to make a successful industry. These industries were nearly all necessarily concentrated spatially in a particular region or regions, and thus they also tended to help create distinct communities. In these districts specialist skills, such as those of the miner or the ironfounder, were prized. The need to trade in commodities like metals or flax also established connections outside these districts. These communities were usually dependent on their

position in a regional, national or sometimes international market, but as well as being the product of market forces they were also influenced by political innovations, as local or national rulers decided to develop particular industries. Economy influenced community, and vice versa.

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Readings

Reading 15.1 Georgius Agricola, *De re metallica*, Book II

Source: Agricola, G. (1950 [1556]), *De re metallica* (trans. H. Hoover and L. Hoover), New York, Dover, pp. 27–8.

When a man owns mines but is ignorant of the art of mining, then it is advisable that he should share in common with others the expenses, not of one only, but of several mines. When one man alone meets the expense for a long time of a whole mine, if good fortune bestows on him a vein abundant in metals, or in other products, he becomes very wealthy; if, on the contrary, the mine is poor and barren, in time he will lose everything which he has expended on it. But the man who, in common with others, has laid out his money on several mines in a region renowned for its wealth of metals, rarely spends it in vain, for fortune usually responds to his hopes in part. For when out of twelve veins in which he has a joint interest one yields an abundance of metals, it not only gives back to the owner the money he has spent, but also gives a profit besides; certainly there will be for him rich and profitable mining, if of the whole number, three, or four, or more veins should yield metal.

[p. 28]

Reading 15.2 Georgius Agricola, *De re metallica*, Book VI

Source: Agricola, G. (1950 [1556]), *De re metallica* (trans. H. Hoover and L. Hoover), New York, Dover, pp. 192, 194.

The third pump of this kind is employed by miners when no river capable of turning a water-wheel can be diverted and it is made as follows. They first dig a chamber and erect strong timbers and planks to prevent the sides from falling in, which would overwhelm the pump and kill the men. The roof of the chamber is protected with contiguous timbers, so arranged that the horses which pull the machine can travel over it. Next they again set up sixteen beams forty feet long and one foot wide and thick, joined by clamps at the top and spreading apart at the bottom, and they fit the lower end of each beam into a separate sill laid flat on the ground, and join these by a post; thus there is created a circular area of which the diameter is fifty feet.

[p. 194]

Through an opening in the centre of this area there descends an upright square axle, forty-five feet long and a foot and a half wide and thick; its lower pivot revolves in a socket in a block laid flat on the ground in the chamber, and the upper pivot revolves in a bearing in a beam which is mortised into two beams at the summit beneath the clamps; the lower pivot is seventeen feet distant from either side of the chamber. i.e. from its front and rear. At the height of a foot above its lower end, the axle has a toothed wheel, the diameter of which is twenty-two feet. This wheel is composed of four spokes and eight rim pieces; the spokes are fifteen feet long and three quarters of a foot wide and thick one end of them is mortised in the axle, the other in the two rims where they are joined together. These rims are three-quarters of a foot thick and one foot wide, and from them there rise and project upright teeth three-quarters of a foot high, half a foot wide, and six digits thick ... This machine, which draws water from a shaft two hundred and forty feet deep, is worked by thirty-two horses; eight of them work for four hours, and then these rest for twelve hours, and the same number take their place. This kind of machine is employed at the foot of the Harz mountains and in the neighbourhood. Further, if necessity arrives, several pumps of this kind are often built for the purpose of mining one vein, but arranged differently in different localities varying according to the depth. In Schemnitz, in the Carpathian mountains, there are three pumps, of which the lowest lifts from the water from the lowest sump to the first drains, through which it flows into the second sump; the intermediate one lifts from the second sump to the second drain, from which it flows into the third sump; and the upper one lifts it to the drains of the tunnel, through which it flows away. This system of three machines of this kind is turned by ninety-six horses.



Figure 1 Georgius Agricola, illustration of a pump, from *De re metallica libri XII. Quibus officia, instrumenta, machinae, ac omnia denique ad metallicam spectantia, non modo luculentissime describuntur, sed et per effigies...*

Published 1556 by H. Froben & N. Bischoff, Basel. The Wellcome Library, London. Photo: Image produced by ProQuest as part of Early English Books: www.proquest.com. Key: A—Upright axle. B—Toothed wheel. C—Teeth. D—Horizontal axle. E—Drum which is made of rundles. F—Second drum. G—Drawing-chain. H—The balls. Key in English from H. Hoover and L. H. Hoover (1912), *Georgius Agricola, De re metallica* (translated from the first Latin edition of 1556), London, The Mining Magazine.

Reading 15.3 Edmund Teesdale 'The 1574 lists of ironworks in the Weald'

Source: Teesdale, E. (1986) 'The 1574 lists of ironworks in the Weald. A re-examination' in *Wealden Iron, Bulletin of the Wealden Iron Research Group*, no. 6, pp. 34–7.

[p. 34–5]

Thomas STOLYON of HEFILDE	farmeth the one half of a forge and furnace being in the pishe [parish] of BURRISHE & WALDON of Sir John PELHAM kt., more half a furnise in the pishe WARBELTON of Syr Rich. BAKER kt. and a forge of Mr. John PARKER
Thomas ISTED of MAYFILDE	occupyeth of his owne one forge in MAYFELD
Willm. RELFE of CRALLE	occupieth of his owne one furnace called HERFEILD in the pishe of HETHFELDE
Thomas ELLYS of MAYFILDE	farmeth one forge of Sir John PELHAM lying in MAYFELD called BIBLEHAM forge
George MAY of BURYSHE	occupieth one forge in SALEHURSTE called BUGGSHELL forge of one Robt. WELCHE
Thomas GLIDE of BURYSHE	Formerly one forge and a furnise, the forge being in ECHEINGHAM and the furnise in MONDFELD of Sir Robert TERWITT KT. more the said Thomas occupieth one furnesse of my L. DACRES beinge in the pishe of HERSTMONNSER called CLIPPERHAM furnisse

[p. 36–7]

John COLLYNS of BURYSHE being an old man of LXXX yeres of age and not able to travell	
Simon COLMAN of BRIGHTLING but he is very sick and not able to travell	
Thomas COLLYNS of BRIGHTLING	occupieth of his owne one furnace in BRIGHTLING
Richard WICKS of BATTELL	one forge two furnasses thone in BATTAILL thother in WHATHINGTON

John BAKER of BATTELL	one furnase in MAYFELD
John PORTER of BATTELL	a forge in FRANT and LAMBREST
Thomas HAYE of HASTINGS	a furnase within ye parish of BATTAIL
Bartholomewe JEFFERY of BUCKHOLDE	of BEKSELL hath one forge and one furnesse In BUCKOLDE
John RELFE of CROWHURST, but he is very sick with the ...?	farmeth one forge lyinge in the pise of CROWHURST of Sir John PELHAM knight
Richard GRENE of WINCHELSEY	
Thomas MAYE of TYCEHURST	of WINCHELSEY hath one furnasse in ECHINGHAM

Chapter 16 Popular action: ritual, protest and riot

Amanda Goodrich

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Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- understand various forms of popular culture and action in relation to political, social and economic issues in early modern European communities
- recognise the concepts of popular ‘agency’ and the popular ‘voice’
- appreciate the relevant historiography and how historians have interpreted popular action by concepts such as the ‘moral economy’ and a ‘culture of retribution’.

Introduction

This chapter explores how ordinary people took action to make claims, express grievances or assert their views in a hierarchical society in which monarchs and the nobility were very powerful and practices of deference and condescension were embedded. Ordinary people had little formal say in politics. Nevertheless, it is widely recognised by historians that ordinary people did engage with issues that affected them. But if they wished to get their voices heard, they needed to do so in particular, often informal, ways. Such action could take many forms, from small neighbourhood disputes and traditional local rituals, to major revolts and riots that might spill over local or regional boundaries and involve considerable violence. This popular action addressed a wide variety of issues, whether social, cultural, economic or political, such as the moral censure of a neighbour committing adultery, dissatisfaction at the usurping of traditional customs and practices, the imposition of new or increased taxes, or even who was the rightful king. One of the most common causes of riot in the early modern period was grain shortages. Bad harvests were frequent at this time and the resulting grain and bread scarcity frequently led to riots.

Defining ‘the people’ who took part in ‘popular’ action in the early modern period is not straightforward. Popular action is often identified closely with the poor, but in fact it was not just a matter of the poor attacking the rich. People from various sectors of society were engaged in action at certain times and over particular issues. In this chapter, then, ‘the people’ does not refer to a fixed group but includes those who took part in such action; while rural peasants and poor labourers often formed the bulk of such groups, artisans, shopkeepers and those of the middling sort sometimes joined in or led such action – and on occasion gentlemen took part too. Women and children also often became involved; indeed women were sometimes instrumental. As you will see, those who were opposed to the action taken would generally deride the people as a ‘mob’ or ‘rabble’ or in similar terms.

It is also important to consider who the people were taking action against. Again this varied depending on the place and the nature of the grievance. Protest could be made against neighbours of similar social status, or against those with greater power and authority, such as local landowners, employers or magistrates, governments or even the monarch. In cases of **enclosure**, for instance, protest could be focused

on one landowner who had enclosed land, or on the government for enabling enclosure. A political grievance would generally be focused against the monarch or parliament (or equivalent), while an economic grievance might be directed at employers, national government or local authorities of some kind: perhaps magistrates, justices, mayors, or priests. The elite lived in fear of popular action, particularly the more serious riots and revolts, and these were often put down hard, with the full force of the law. But at the same time, the acquiescence of the people was an important element of successful government for monarchs and local magistrates alike in the early modern period. They tended to take a paternalistic approach to the people and in the first instance often attempted to ameliorate popular grievances. This shows that early modern society was not a two-dimensional structure of 'elite' and 'popular' but consisted of rather more complex relationships and dependencies within the social hierarchy, and these also varied from place to place.

Much has been written by historians on popular action but I am adopting a particular angle from which to view this topic. The focus here is on the popular 'voice' and 'agency', that is, how the people made themselves heard and asserted themselves and whether they attained their aims. 'Agency' in this sense may not be a term you are familiar with, and so for a succinct definition I went to The Social Science Jargon-Buster, accessible through the database CREDO on the OU Library website. This is how 'agency' is defined there:

The ability of individuals to affect change, make autonomous and independent choices and act in self-determining ways.

This definition is easy to understand, but we need to consider that agency is often circumscribed by the social or political structures of the world within which we live. In the early modern period people often found their agency restricted by political and social structures and cultural expectations. For example, although many European states had some form of parliament or assembly, very few people had the right to vote for representatives and often only those of high rank could be members. Similarly, servants were expected to be obedient and not challenge or even question their masters. Concepts such as a person's fate being 'in God's hands', due to providence, was a common belief and limited autonomy to some degree. In Book 1 you looked at individuals and it is clear that in the early modern period ordinary

individuals did not generally have much of a 'voice' in politics and society. Nevertheless, they could make their voices heard by coming together as a *community* – a socially, religiously or politically focused group – and expressing their views through popular action. Such action was from necessity primarily a group activity; by joining together in this way to challenge, protest or resist, the people could gain agency.

This chapter explores various forms of popular action and how historians have explained the impetus that lay behind it.

16.1 Popular action

Popular action took many forms, but two main features were common to all and need to be considered: how information about protest circulated and the importance of control of space in the action. As you learned in the chapter ‘Literacy, learning and the printed word’ (Chapter 12), while many early modern people could not read, they could glean political and other information from conversations in taverns and coffee houses, or on street corners, and even from the Sunday sermon. Rumour and gossip comprised another channel of information in neighbourhoods. Popular action often involved song, verse, shouting slogans, rough music and **symbolic** action as a way to get voices heard and impart meaning. So oral culture and word of mouth formed an important dimension of protest, although the growing print culture increasingly assisted in the circulation of information and popular views. By the mid-seventeenth century the burgeoning press meant that news spread quickly, encouraging politicisation and dissidence among ordinary people (Wilson, 1998, p. 29). Towards the end of our period the new concept of public opinion was increasingly recognised as a political force.

Another significant aspect of popular action was the struggle to control public space. Whether this was the town square or village green, or parts of the open countryside, popular action invariably involved temporarily taking over these public places. The geography of popular action is also important as it often spread over considerable areas, localities, regions or even states. Participants sometimes travelled well beyond their own locality, particularly in larger riots or revolts. One such example you will study here is the Revolt of Naples, which started in the city of Naples but spread well beyond into rural areas and across the whole kingdom of Naples. Riots would sometimes erupt in many places at the same time; you will examine the weavers’ riots in Spitalfields, London, but weavers’ riots also occurred in other parts of England, such as Canterbury.

We often think of protest taking dramatic form as riot, revolt and rebellion. But first I would like you to look at other ways in which ordinary people made their voices heard in early modern Europe, often within the local community and based on custom.

Petitioning

One formal method of expressing grievances was to convey them directly to the monarch, the church, government (central or local), magistrates or landowners, by means of a petition. This was a written statement setting out grievances and signed by one or more people. Petitioning was perceived as an enduring popular right stretching back over centuries. It could be on a small scale, with individuals or community groups seeking redress for a local matter, or on a larger scale regarding a regional or national issue. For example, you have come across individuals petitioning to be exempted from quarantine regulations in the chapter ‘Responding to disease’ (Chapter 11). Petitions were couched in deferential language and did not always receive the desired response. In England in 1680 and again in 1713 silk-weavers petitioned Parliament. The 1713 petition was against competition from abroad and a commercial treaty with France that weavers feared would jeopardise their lucrative business. This is how the petition began:

The Case of the Silk-Weavers, Humbly Offered to the Consideration of both Houses of Parliament

That the *Silk Manufacture* of this Kingdom, by the Incouragement of the Crown and divers Acts of Parliament, is above twenty times as great as it was in the Year 1664, and that all sorts of as good *Black* and *Colour'd Silks*, *Gold* and *Silver Stuffs* and *Ribands*, are now made here as in *France*.

(‘The Case of the Silk-Weavers ...’, 1713)

Note here the language of deference and the reference to the ‘incouragement’, or help, the silk-weavers had received from government which had made their business grow. The actual grievances came much later in the petition, and the main complaint was that the Italians and French paid such low customs duty on their silk exports to England that they came to English markets ‘cheaper than our own’; that is, the products made in England.

Such petitions were also used in other parts of Europe. In Naples in 1647, as you will see later, the people petitioned the governor against tax increases. In France petitions took the form of *Cabiers* of grievance commonly presented to the king. Petitioning grew in popularity from

the seventeenth century onwards. In Britain the American War of Independence of 1775–83 prompted petitions incorporating over 40,000 signatures, both for and against the American colonists (Wilson, 1998, pp. 238–9). The most famous petitions in France, the *Cahiers de doléances*, triggered the French Revolution in 1789. Hence petitioning is one example of the way ordinary people had an opportunity to exert agency.

Popular ritual

Another form of action consisted of popular rituals enacted on designated calendar days or in response to the unacceptable behaviour of individuals within the community. Such rituals varied considerably from place to place, but generally involved symbolic activities and public display which conveyed messages and goals the community easily understood (Rogers, 1998, p. 10). Performance, dressing up, disguise, blacking faces, wearing masks, singing songs, shouting slogans, dance, displaying particular props and loud noise or rough music were among the most popular activities. This symbolic action was also often adopted to legitimise activities that involved challenges to social hierarchy or gender or other norms that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable or perhaps unlawful (Howkins and Merricks, 1993, pp. 41–2).

‘Rough music’ was used to attract attention or enhance popular action. The historian E. P. Thompson identified it within the British Isles as taking various forms that included ‘a rude cacophony, with or without elaborate ritual, which usually directed mockery or hostility against individuals who offended against certain community norms’. It incorporated ‘basic human properties ... raucous, ear-shattering noise, un pitying laughter, and the mimicking of obscenities’, sometimes supported ‘by the din of cleavers, tongs, tambourines, ... ram’s horns’, the clashing of pots and pans or ‘pokers and tongs, marrow-bones and cleavers, warming-pans and tin kettles, cherry-clacks and whistles, constables’ rattles, and bladders with peas in them, cow’s horns and tea trays’ and ‘yells and hisses’ (Thompson, 1993, pp. 467–9).

This loud mockery and hostility was a form of asserting popular justice common throughout Europe; the equivalent to rough music in England was *charivari* in France, *käzenmusik* in Germany and *scampanate* in Italy. These terms were often used to define not just the ‘music’ but also the event itself. In the chapter ‘Gender’ (Chapter 14) you have

come across one such event in England called the skimmington. The purpose of these rituals was to express the disapproval of the community against behaviour which contravened community norms such as adultery and to persuade the transgressors to conform or leave the community (Howkins and Merricks, 1993, pp. 45–6).

Exercise 16.1

Briefly study Figure 16.1 and the description that follows.

- What action is portrayed here?
 - What is its symbolic meaning?
- This should take around 15 minutes.



Figure 16.1 Anonymous artist, *Skimmington-Triumph, Or the Humours of Horn Fair*, c.1720, engraving, 31 x 46 cm. British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

This print is described on the British Museum website as a:

Satire on marriage, illustrating a riotous scene in a country village where a shrewish wife and hen-pecked husband are mocked by their neighbours in procession. The couple ride on one horse, the man facing the tail, preceded by another man on horseback who throws grain from a pannier to the crowd. Further to the right, cuckold's horns in the form of a stag's head, a ram's head and a cow's head are held aloft, the latter attached to a woman's shift, and 'rough music' is played on pots and pans. In the background, is a river and a similar procession takes place on the far bank.

(British Museum Collection online, n.d.)

Discussion

- The community is performing rituals such as marching through the village together and making the couple ride on the horse in a particular way. This is how a community made its disapproval heard.
- There is plenty of symbolic action, with the waving of animal heads and the woman's nightshift suggesting that sexual transgression has occurred, and with the 'cuckold' horns implying that the woman has been unfaithful to her husband. Rough music is also being played.

In early modern Europe there were other forms of community rituals, such as festivals and carnivals held on holidays – specific days in the calendar. Many of these provided an opportunity for people to take a break from work, enjoy themselves and, often, attend religious ceremonies. But such holidays frequently included customary rituals that reversed social and gender hierarchy, for example the election of a 'bishop boy' while the real bishop stood down. In others people claimed dole – that is, gifts of food, ale or money – and other privileges from their neighbours of higher rank. Such rituals involved much symbolic performance and a certain amount of confrontation

and even aggression. The ‘squirrel hunt’, for instance (as you will learn in online session 16.1), was an attack on local landowners. By enacting such rituals the people could make their voices heard and gain agency. Rituals often reflected nostalgia for past customs lost, such as for the time before land had been enclosed.

Landowners and magistrates generally accepted the demands for dole and so on, partly because the social order was only temporarily challenged. In general these rituals were not punished by the authorities unless excessive violence was involved.

Two sixteenth-century prints from Germany (Figures 16.2 and 16.3) provide evidence of early calendric festivals. They are from a series by Sebald Beham (1500–1550) entitled *The Peasants’ Festival and Twelve Months*, showing people engaged in rituals marking the months of the year. Figure 16.2 represents traditional festive music and dancing, but in Figure 16.3 six peasants are fighting with swords, a lance and a club; in the background a vine is shown, representing excessive drinking. Such images were common from around the mid-1520s in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. They emerged from a longer tradition in poems and in farces performed at banquets and carnival processions (V&A, n.d.(a)).

In the study of popular action historians have been influenced by anthropologists. In their broad explorations of, and comparisons between, different cultures, anthropologists have examined the meanings of rituals and the symbolic action employed by the participants. Their arguments about how social boundaries and structures are challenged and transgressed during these rituals have assisted historians’ understanding of past popular action; this is an example of valuable working across academic disciplines (Howkins and Merricks, 1993, pp. 41–53).



Figure 16.2 Print made by Sebald Beham, *The Peasants' Festival and Twelve Months: May and June*, 1546, engraving, 5 x 7 cm, British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 16.3 Print made by Sebald Beham, *The Peasants' Festival and Twelve Months: The Peasants' Brawl*, 1547, engraving, 5 x 7 cm, British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Most of the rituals I have discussed so far were instigated by local people, but in early modern society there were also other forms of ritual activity. The government, the church or local authorities sometimes organised celebrations to express loyalty to the incumbent regime. For example, historian David Cressy has introduced the notion of ‘the English Protestant calendar’, which refers to the days that from the sixteenth century onwards were marked throughout the year to celebrate royal and national anniversaries; among these were the anniversaries of the coronation of Elizabeth I (1533–1603, reigned 1558–1603) and of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, known as ‘Gunpowder Treason Day’. Such dates were intended to promote loyalty to the monarch and the country and to highlight England’s distinctiveness from the rest of Europe (Cressy, 1990, p. 32). They often involved lavishly orchestrated parades and pageants with bonfires, food, drink and music, the pealing of church bells and church services. The reaction of the people to such loyalist events was an important gauge of the regime’s popularity on the ground (Rogers, 1998, pp. 274–5). At these events the people were expected not to assert agency but to take part as respectful spectators or participants, wearing ribbons, cockades and other badges of allegiance, as instructed by local leaders.

Online session 16.1

Now go to the module website and complete online session 16.1. This should take around 2 hours.

16.2 Protest, riot and rebellion

Beyond ritual, and sometimes as an extension of it, came more overt protest, riot and rebellion. These were common occurrences in early modern Europe, both in urban and in rural areas. Many protests were small and localised, such as some of those over enclosure throughout Britain, and in Europe as a whole, but larger-scale revolts also occurred, which were generally over bigger issues – political, economic or religious – than the popular action you have studied so far. They also challenged authority more directly. The most enduring and possibly effective way the people made their voices heard was by getting out into public spaces and voicing their views and asserting their grievances *en masse*, loudly, belligerently and often with violence.

Exercise 16.2

Now turn to Bernard Capp, 'Riot and rebellion' in the set book and read pages 317–25. Read this quite quickly, to get an overview of riots and their significance in Europe.

This should take around 30 minutes.

There is no discussion for this exercise.

We tend to think of riots and revolts as chaotic, spontaneous uprisings but, as this quotation from historian Henry Kamen shows, some were quite well organised. ('Guyenne' was the name of the region of Aquitaine previously under English rule.)

In 1548 the first of a series of major uprisings broke out in Aquitaine in protest against the introduction of a salt tax (*gabelle*). Rural areas set themselves up into communes, as at Saintonge and Angoumois, and the revolt (of the 'Pitauts') spread into the city of Bordeaux, which was taken over by the rebels. So extensive was the uprising that the royal army was sent to suppress it, but the demands of the province were met and Aquitaine in 1549 was freed 'forever' from the *gabelle* (which, in fact, was reintroduced without incident during the seventeenth century). Anxiety for regional privileges encouraged rebels to hark back to the myth of

a medieval age of freedom 'in the time of the English'. 'Guyenne, Guyenne!' cried the rebels in the streets of Bordeaux.

(Kamen, 2000, p. 140)

Here the local people organised themselves into communes (cooperative groups) and then had sufficient strength to take over Bordeaux. The royal army suppressed this extensive uprising but a compromise was reached in that the people were freed from the new salt tax. Kamen does not suggest why this happened, but fear of further uprisings may have prompted the concession. So despite the intervention of military forces, popular action here achieved its aim and people gained agency. Also note that the rebels expressed the desire to return to a mythical time of better English rule before regional privileges were lost: you have seen earlier that much popular action had a nostalgic component.

Now we turn to Italy to study a major revolt which was also triggered by taxation.

The Revolt of Naples

The 1640s was a period of much instability across Europe, due in part to grain shortages, although rebellions broke out over various issues. On 7 July 1647 a protest erupted in the marketplace of the city of Naples, capital of the kingdom of Naples (see Maps 1 and 2 on pages 367–8 of the set book). The kingdom consisted of 12 provinces and was under Spanish control. The Spanish had been imposing heavy taxes to fund their wars and local landowners routinely imposed levies on the peasants. The imposition of a salt tax and a tax on flour, vegetables and fruit prompted a protest, which echoed a recent revolt in Palermo (in Sicily, which was also under Spanish rule) over similar taxes.

Ostensibly, the leader of the Naples riot was an illiterate fisherman from Amalfi, Tommaso Aniello (1620–1647), known as Masaniello (he is depicted in Figure 16.4). He whipped up the peasants to protest about the taxes and considerable violence ensued. Masaniello was hailed by locals as the hero of the event and 'a man sent from God', but after only ten days he was assassinated. The revolt split into factions, spread to other areas and became overtly political, with more sophisticated leaders and an expanded agenda that incorporated wider political discontent against Spanish rule. Nine months later a republic

was declared in the kingdom of Naples, although it did not last long and Naples was returned to Spain in April 1648 (Black, 2001, pp. 192–3). This was, then, a very different form of popular action from those you have studied so far. It was considerably more violent and grew from a localised event into something much more extensive in terms of both the cause and the geographical coverage.

Exercise 16.3

Turn to Reading 16.1, 'The preface by way of introduction' and Reading 16.2, 'On 7 July 1647', located at the end of the chapter. These are both extracts from Francis Midon, *The History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello* (first published in 1729).

Read these and then answer the following questions:

- What action did the people take, and against whom?
- What was the immediate result of the action?
- How does Midon represent Masaniello?

This should take around 40 minutes.

Discussion

- The rebels first organised themselves to line the street and petition the governor of the kingdom, the Viceroy Duke of Acros. The petitioning here was direct action, begging for relief, rather than the formal writing you have seen before. The action then moved on to incorporate disorderly threats. There is clearly a sense of progression of events here, with the crowd increasing its demands and growing violence; the focus remained on the original cause.
 - The people's action did not result in a clear resolution in the short term. Terrified by the revolt, the viceroy attempted to appease the people on a number of occasions. But his actions were insufficient and the crowd rejected his offers. Here the people got their voices heard, but from Midon's account it is hard to know whether they achieved their aims.
 - Midon represents Masaniello as the leader of the revolt who fired up the people with an impromptu speech on 7 July. The speech represents Masaniello as both a political and a religious leader of some eloquence.
-

You may question the authenticity of the speech, since Masaniello was supposedly illiterate. The speech also appears in the pamphlet by Giraffi (Figure 16.4), in very similar wording, but this does not mean that Masaniello really gave it. The uncertainty here again raises the issue of how we can recover what the poor and illiterate might have said, and of the reliability of evidence attributed to them.

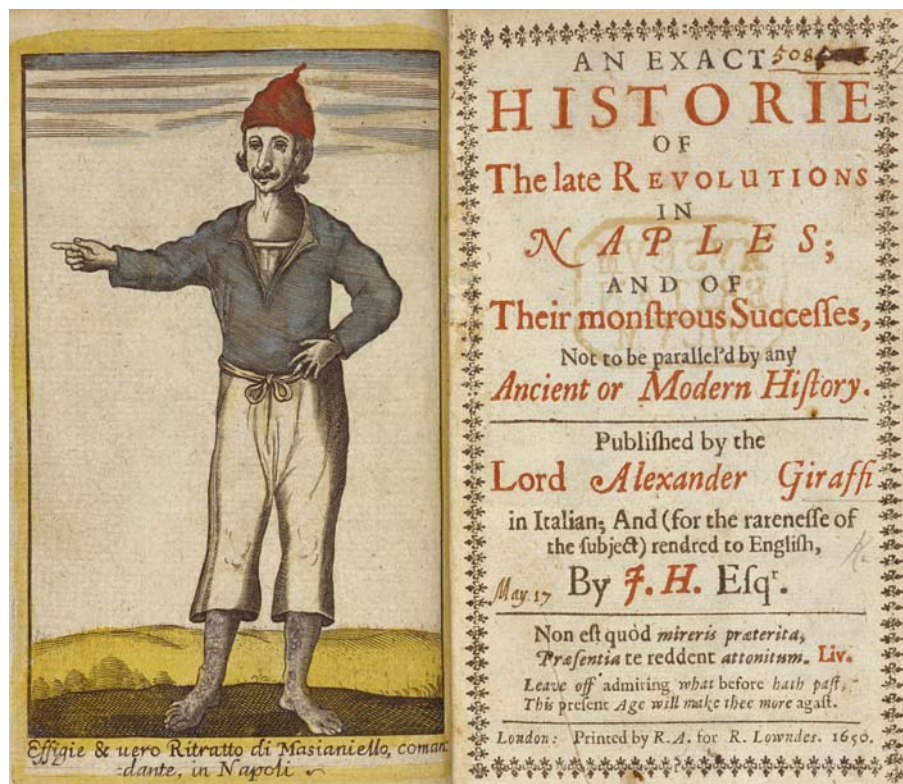


Figure 16.4 Frontispiece and title page, *An Exact Historie of the Late Revolutions in Naples; and of their Monstrous Successes ...* 1650, London. This account of the revolt, written by the Italian Alessandro Giraffi, was translated into English by J. Howell. Photo: British Library, London. Note that Masaniello (pictured in the left-hand plate) is represented here as very much the poor fisherman, barefoot and in simple clothing. He is pointing with his right hand, which became the gesture of the revolt.

Exercise 16.4

Consider the title page shown in Figure 16.5 and then turn to Reading 16.3, Francis Midon, 'On sources', located at the end of the chapter. This is another extract from Midon's *History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello* (1729).

Read this and then answer the following questions:

- What claims does Midon make as to the reliability of accounts of the revolt? And as to his own?
- How reliable do you consider his account to be, as evidenced by all three readings?

This should take around 15 minutes.

Discussion

- In both the title page and the excerpt from his preface in Reading 16.3, Midon pitches his account against the partiality of all others and claims the authenticity of his sources. He stresses that his is the only unbiased and authentic account that represents the story of Masaniello in 'its true and genuine light'.
 - Midon's account was not published until 1729, some considerable time after the event, and he compiled it from other accounts. So this is not the first-hand report of someone who experienced the events themselves. It is clear that Midon has relied on translations of his sources as he claims there are virtually none in English, except of course Howell's translation of Giraffi's pamphlet (Figure 16.4). You may also have noticed in Readings 16.1 and 16.2 that Midon describes the rioters as the 'mob', 'the rabble' and 'all sorts of loose people' which reflects a common elite approach to the people one might view as bias.
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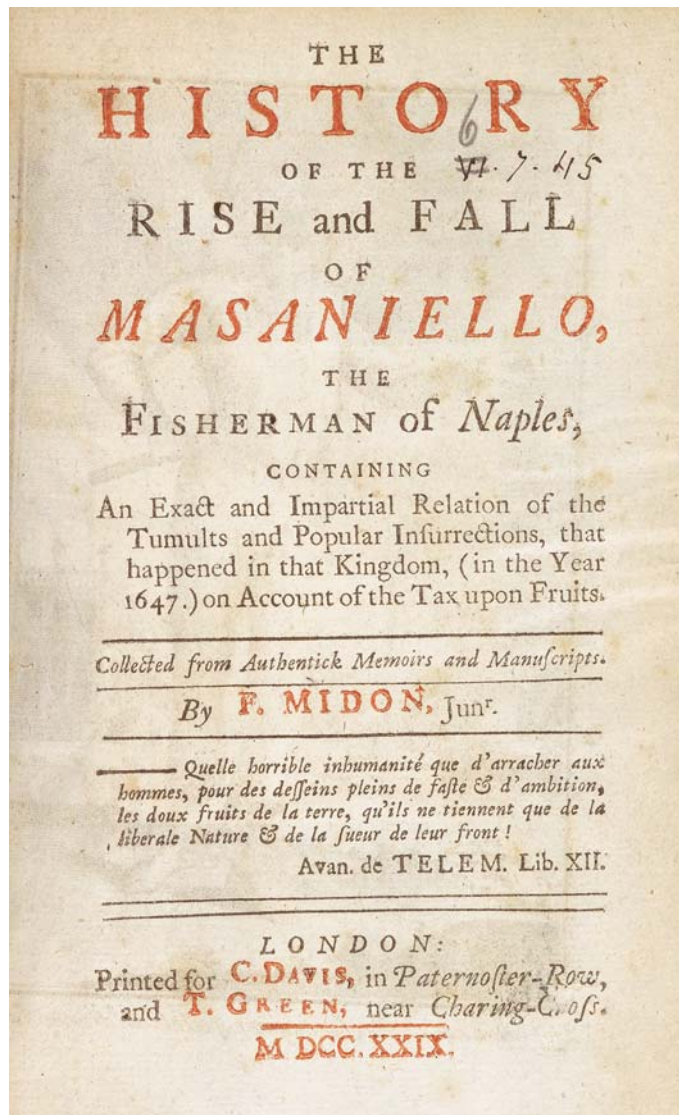


Figure 16.5 Title page, F. Midon, contribution by Masaniello, *The History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello, the Fisherman of Naples, etc.* Printed for C. Davis, and T. Green, 1729. Photo: Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. This is another account of the Naples revolt, written by an Englishman and first published in 1729.

Masaniello became a folk hero and a martyr, an image that was cultivated by propaganda, prints, paintings and contemporary writings (Black, 2001, p. 193). Indeed the image of Masaniello as a revolutionary leader still ‘casts its spell’ today (Elliott, 2014, p 287). But much controversy has grown over this myth and the revolt remains a subject of dispute among historians. Some question narratives that

represent it as based in Naples city, arguing that such representations have concealed the true scope and meaning of the full revolt. It has been suggested that the story of the events with Masaniello as leader was promoted by the Spanish government at the time to minimise it as a merely localised riot by an unruly mob (Elliott, 2014, pp. 286–7). In fact the revolt was much more complex, involving different sectors of society with different motivations and grievances. This example illustrates the challenges historians face when dealing with popular protest.

‘Riot’?

To gain a broader understanding of riots and revolts we will turn to two eighteenth-century British protests: the Jacobite rebellions and the economic protest of the Spitalfields weavers. The number of riots in Britain increased towards the later part of our period and the eighteenth century has been described as ‘an age of riot’ (Randall, 2006, p. 303). Before we look at these events, you need to understand the meaning of the word ‘riot’ and the specific legal sense in which it was used in eighteenth-century Britain.

The scholarly apparatus of the database The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, London’s Central Criminal Court, 1674–1913 (the Old Bailey Online), which you will be exploring in your independent study, provides a useful definition:

A riot was held to have taken place if 3 or more people assembled to do an unlawful act, usually commit a breach of the peace, and then performed it. Also included in the category of rioter are those who only assembled with the intention of committing such a breach, whether or not it was performed. Unlawful Assembly was the normal charge in this instance. If individuals assembled unlawfully and then moved towards committing a riot but did not actually achieve their purpose, they were charged with a Rout ... the 1715 Riot Act ... required members of groups of 12 or more rioters to disperse.

(Proceedings of the Old Bailey, n.d.)

This description suggests that ‘riot’ was loosely applied to small or large group actions that were identified as acts of ‘breaching the peace’. This may sound a vague concept, but what is important here is the

legal context of the definition. Many disturbances we might understand as protests or skirmishes could be deemed a crime and prosecuted as such. Such riots were often identified and reported as action by the 'the mob', a term used at the time which you have already come across in this chapter.

Exercise 16.5

Examine Figures 16.6 and 16.7 and read the captions. These prints are, of course, not photographs of what actually happened. But their captions and how they portray events offer an insight into popular understandings of riot.

Then answer the following questions:

- How do the artists portray the riots?
- Do these representations fit the legal description of a riot?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

In Figure 16.6 a crowd has gathered to protest outside Peter Wood's bawdy house. There are about ten visible protestors, but the picture gives a sense of a larger group behind. They are led by four or five men who from their dress we can identify as of the middling sort or gentlemen, although there is one man in an apron, shirt and workman's trousers just behind the leader, which suggests a mixed, community group. The leader carries a light and appears to be negotiating with Peter Wood in the doorway. Another raises his arm as if to halt the crowd behind him and also holds up a cane, as many of them do, in a somewhat threatening manner. The men are, then, armed and according to the caption are intending to pull down the bawdy house, a common form of community action. This event would certainly fall within the category of breaching the peace and the legal definition of riot. Here the group is taking community action on moral grounds, rather as you saw in the skimmington print (Figure 16.1).

Figure 16.7 shows a large armed group, defined as a mob, gathered outside Newgate prison as it burns dramatically. Notice the socially mixed nature of the crowd again and, this time, the presence of women. This was clearly a riot. As a result of this event, many people were arrested and prosecuted at the Old Bailey.

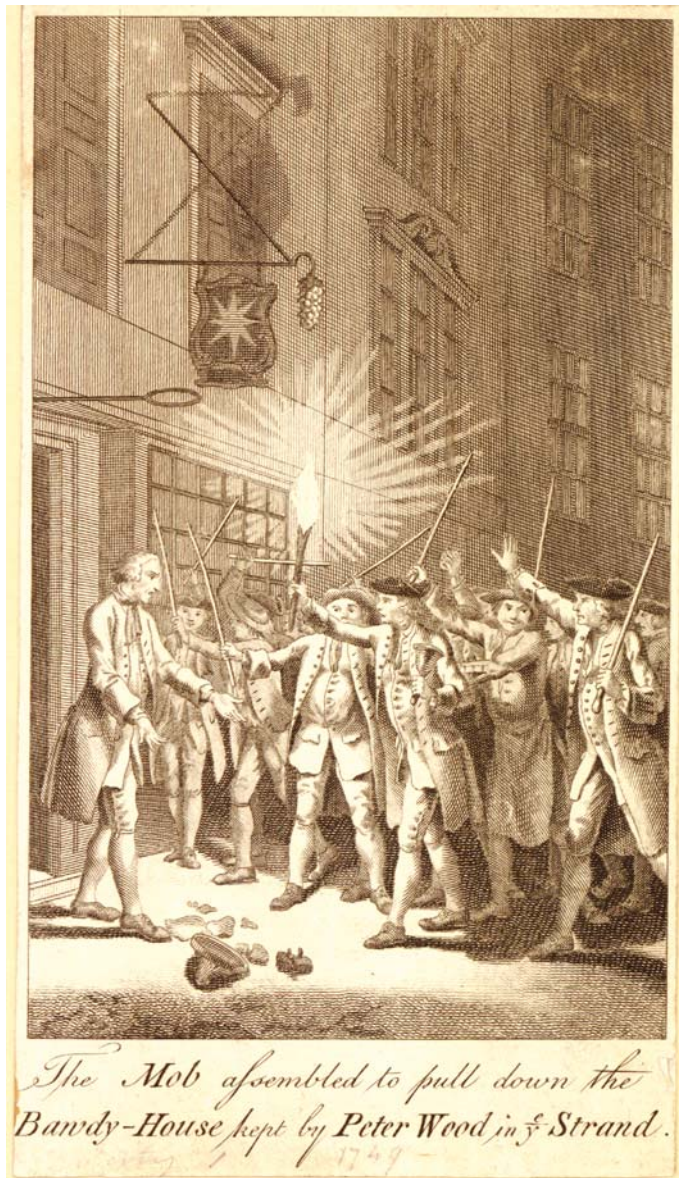


Figure 16.6 Unknown engraver, *The Mob Assembled to Pull down the Bawdy-House Kept by Peter Wood in ye Strand*, 1749, etching and engraving. British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum. (A bawdy house was a brothel.)

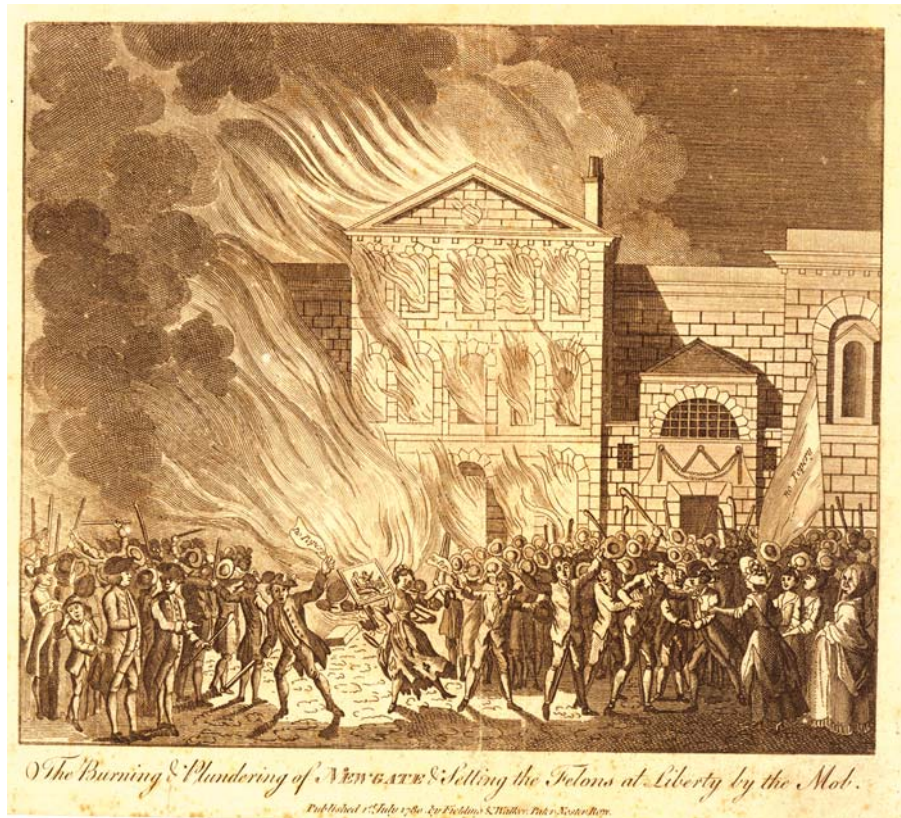


Figure 16.7 Unknown engraver, *The Burning & Plundering of Newgate & Setting the Felons at Liberty by the Mob*, 1780, etching and engraving. British Museum, London. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum. This print depicts the violence and damage of the Gordon Riots in 1780, the worst riots of the century, which continued for a week and involved much violence and damage to property. The riots started as an anti-Catholic protest but also served as an outlet for other grievances, political and economic. Government and public buildings, the houses of MPs and prisons were attacked and the army had to be called in to suppress the riots after five days of unrest.

The Jacobite riots

The Jacobite rebellions that spread around Britain and Ireland marked one of the most significant British political crises of the early modern period. They involved over 60 years of unrest, with intermittent riots and two serious military rebellions in 1715 and 1745. The Jacobites were supporters of the Stuart dynasty. Both the Stuart king James II of England and VII of Scotland (1633–1701, reigned 1685–8) and his son and potential heir to the throne were Catholics. Consequently James

was ousted from the throne in England in 1688 (an event termed the Glorious Revolution) in favour of the Protestant William III (1650–1702, reigned 1689–1702) and James' daughter, Mary II (1662–1694, reigned 1689–94). They were followed by Mary's sister, Queen Anne (1665–1714, reigned 1702–14). But in 1714 a German Protestant from Hanover acceded to the throne as George I (1660–1727, reigned 1714–27), and this led to riots, uprisings and the first Jacobite rebellion. People were divided over who was the legitimate king of Britain. Jacobitism split the nation along political and religious lines. It was linked primarily with the **Tories**, while support for George I came from the Whig party.

Jacobite ideas spread across a broad sector of society and a Jacobite culture developed. Elite Jacobites expressed their loyalty through artefacts, poetry and sermons, while the poorer supporters used songs, verse and broadside ballads to lament a lost tradition of Stuart reign (Pittock, 1997, pp. 109–18). Most major towns in Britain experienced Jacobite disturbances between 1715 and 1745, with opposing supporters, known as 'Mugs' (Whig and Hanoverian supporters) and 'Jacks' (Jacobite supporters), doing battle on the streets (Wilson, 1998, pp. 102–3). Such action would erupt intermittently, but particularly on Jacobite celebratory days such as the birthday of the Stuart pretender to the throne. Jacobites also disrupted, with protests and riots, the organised loyalist parades and pageants held by Protestants. A sense of popular ritual and symbolic action can also be identified in Jacobite events, with the use of verse, song, slogans, props and wearing badges of loyalty such as white roses, although they often turned very violent.

Paul Kleber Monod has noted that while Jacobite protestors 'expressed the sympathies of a large portion of the English population over a remarkable period of time', most Jacobite protestors in England were 'shopkeepers, artisans and labourers residing in cities or towns'. Nor were the actions of Jacobite crowds necessarily spontaneous: they were often organised or manipulated by elites (Kleber Monod, 1993, p. 164). Thus 'the people' here were somewhat different from those you have encountered in earlier examples of popular protest and action.

The two pamphlet frontispieces in Figures 16.8 and 16.9 illustrate the opposition to Jacobitism in Britain, the first condemning the Jacobite riots and the second exhorting all Protestants in Britain and Ireland to unite against Jacobites.

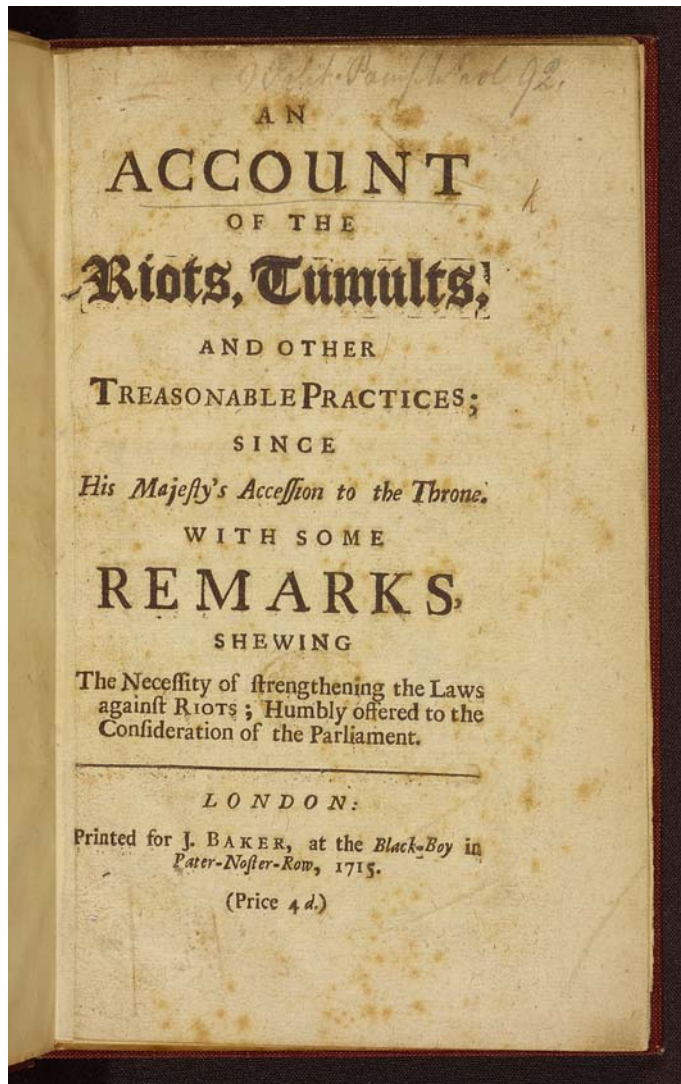


Figure 16.8 Pamphlet frontispiece, *An Account of the Riots, Tumults, and Other Treasonable Practices ...*, 1715, London, printed for J. Baker. Photo: © The British Library Board.

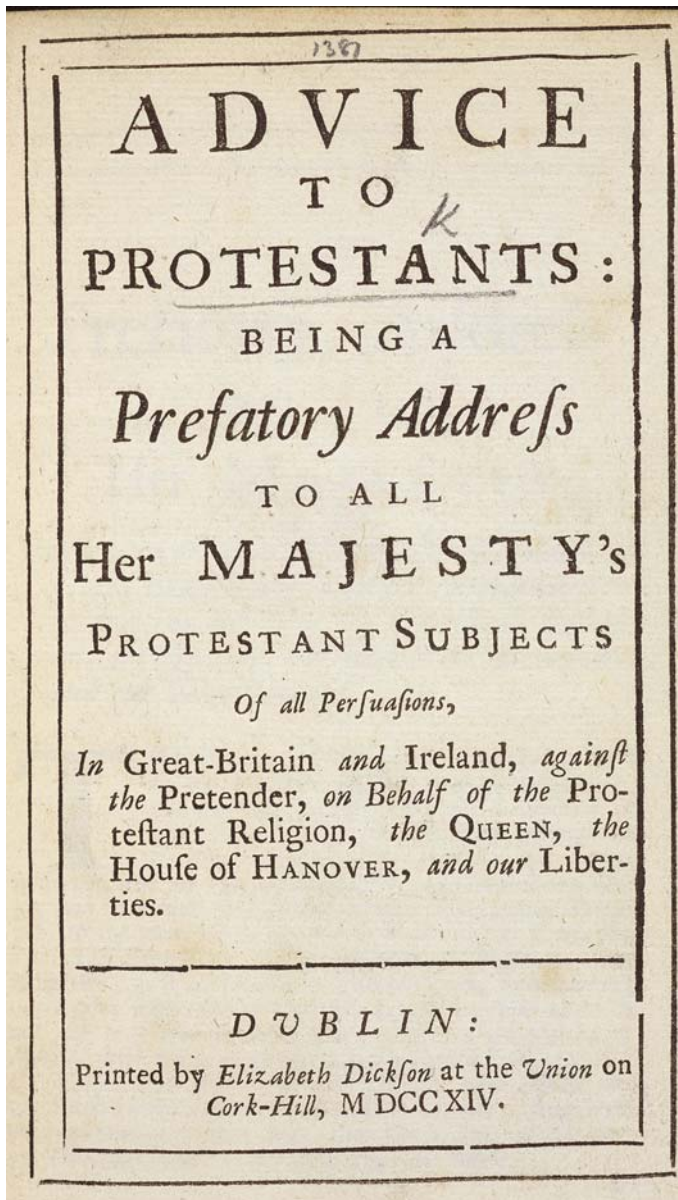


Figure 16.9 Title page, *Advice to Protestants: being a prefatory address (to a book entitul'd, An historical essay on the Loyalty of Presbyterians), to all Her Majesty [Queen Anne]'s Protestant Subjects of all persuasions, in Great-Britain and Ireland, against the Pretender ...*, 1714. Published in Dublin. Photo: British Library, London.

Jacobitism was perceived as a political threat to the very basis of the Protestant state. Consequently there was no possible compromise open to the government. Disturbances were put down by armed forces and the full force of the law was brought against Jacobite activists, who were often charged with treason. Indeed, the Riot Act 1715, about which you read earlier, was introduced in response to the Jacobite disturbances. Thinking back to the definition of ‘agency’ at the beginning of this chapter, we may conclude that Jacobites made autonomous and independent choices, acted in self-determining ways and got their voices heard, but were not successful in achieving their aims.

The Spitalfields weavers’ riots

Many riots in the early modern period erupted in response to economic hardship. An example is provided by the silk-weavers’ riots which occurred in various places in Europe. In England they erupted intermittently during the eighteenth century in response to competing commercial imports, or as wage disputes. The Spitalfields weavers’ riots of 1719 were a protest against the failure of government to prevent the import of cheaper calico fabric from India, sales of which threatened the lucrative home-grown silk-weaving industry. The livelihood of weavers was precarious; there were no employment regulations and they could lose their jobs without notice if work dried up due to competition. Riots such as these are, then, an example of community action taken by ordinary workers against government and commercial interests.

Online session 16.2

Now go to the module website and complete online session 16.2. This should take around 2 hours.

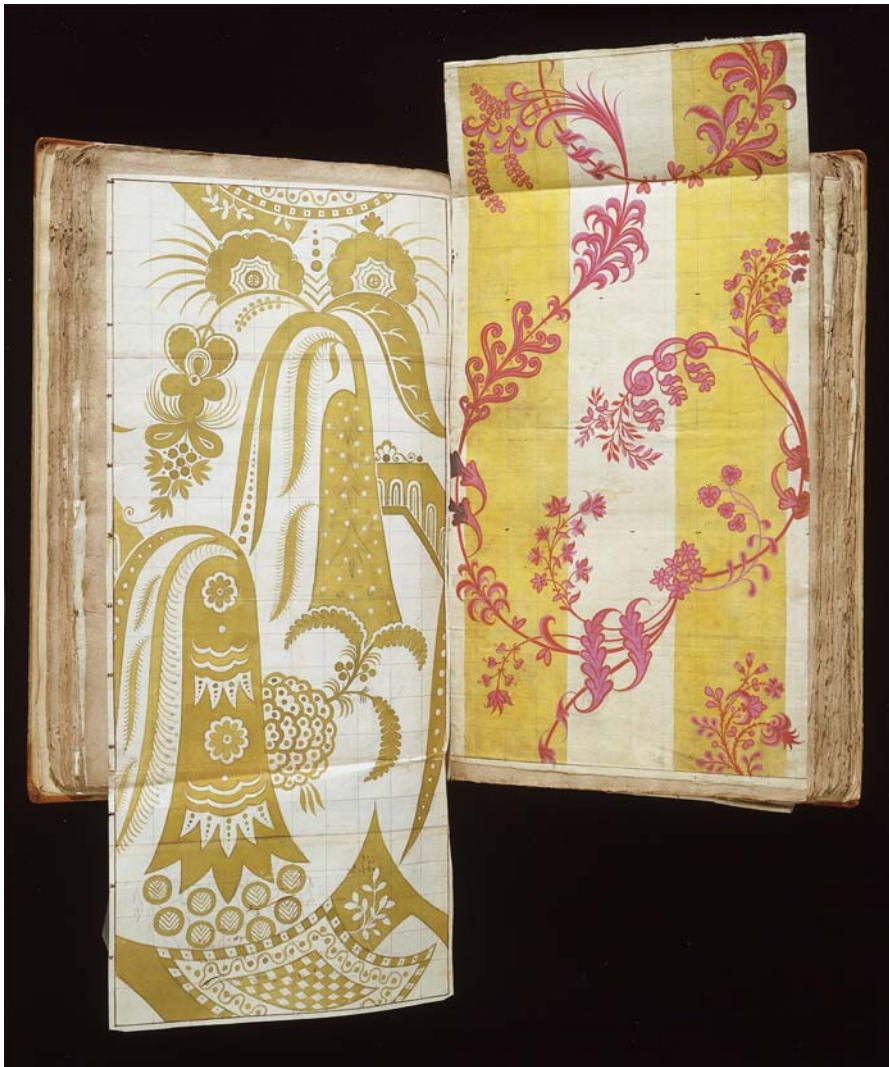


Figure 16.10 James Leman (a Spitalfields designer and maker), design sketchbook, c.1713, pencil, pen and ink, watercolour and bodycolour on laid paper. Purchased with the assistance of The Art Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Photo: © The Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 'This design is from an album that contains 104 designs for fine woven silk cloth A constant supply of fashionable new designs from which to create new lines was required, so patternmakers and master weavers like James Leman supplied a wide range of designs for different weavers' (V&A, n.d.(b)).

While the weavers made their voices heard on the streets, manufacturers and corporations involved in the silk-weaving trade also wanted relief from overseas competition. A petition presented to Parliament by the Canterbury Weavers in 1713 stated that this was ‘A Petition of the Master, Wardens, and Assistants of the Corporation of Silk-Weavers in the City of Canterbury’ and so had the weight of a corporation behind it (‘The History of the Proceedings of the House of Commons ...’, 1742). This suggests that the calls for government action in relation to silk-weaving extended beyond the weavers themselves and it was probably this as much as the rioting by workers that ensured relief was provided. In 1784 an Act was passed over wages, ‘Empowering the magistrates ... to settle and regulate the prices of Journeymen silk weavers, working within their respective jurisdictions’ (‘An Abstract’, 1789). Thus such economic claims were on occasion alleviated by government, and the people gained agency by petitioning and demonstrating.

So far you have learned that groups of ordinary people readily took various forms of action, including petitioning, customary rituals and riot. These could represent one-off grievances about local adultery, or protest over widespread and longer-term issues such as in the Revolt of Naples or the Jacobite riots. In taking such action, the people gained a voice even if they did not always obtain what they wanted and their agency might be curbed by the authorities, including through legislation and punishment. Historian Steve Hindle claimed that, ‘while violent protest would inevitably lead to punishment, peaceful complaint might lead to redress’. This ‘antithesis of order and disorder’ was played out throughout the early modern period (Hindle, 2002, pp. 1–2). Practical matters also had a role; for example, with no police forces as we know them today, authorities were limited in the use of force against rioters, particularly in rural areas. Concessions were, then, often an expedient first option.

16.3 Historiographical study

In this section you will study grain riots, one of the most common forms of protest in the early modern period. It is also an opportunity to look in detail at two competing interpretations of the impetus and meaning of these events provided by two important historians: E. P. Thompson and William Beik.

Until the mid-twentieth century historians tended to take a ‘top-down’ approach to food riots, studying them from the perspective of the authorities and identifying them as a spontaneous eruption of a violent and unruly mob threatened with starvation. In this interpretation there was a clear dichotomy between ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’, and the possibility of popular agency was denied. In the early 1960s a number of historians, often Marxists or socialists, began to view such events from ‘below’; that is, assessing them from the point of view of ordinary people rather than the elite. Consequently they relabelled the mob as the crowd and riots as protest, resistance or crowd action. Most significantly, Thompson in an article in the academic journal *Past & Present* (1971), which was later republished in his book *Customs in Common* (Thompson, 1993), reassessed the grain riots and concluded that:

It is possible to detect in almost every eighteenth-century crowd action some legitimising notion. By the notion of legitimation I mean that the men and women in the crowd were informed by the belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs; and, in general, that they were supported by the wider consensus of the community. On occasion this popular consensus was endorsed by some measure of licence afforded by the authorities. More commonly, the consensus was so strong that it overrode motives of fear or deference.

(Thompson, 1993, p. 188)

Thompson went on to argue that the food riot was ‘a highly complex form of popular action, disciplined and with clear objectives’:

It is of course true that riots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractices among dealers and by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were

legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking etc. This in its turn was grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor.

(Thompson, 1993, p. 188)

In other words, the crowd took action when it felt that traditional rights or customs had been overridden or disregarded, such as during grain shortages when merchants and middlemen (or ‘jobbers’, as they were called) were exporting grain and abusing the traditional rights of the people to purchase it at a reasonable price. Similarly, the crowd took action when regulations that required bread to be of a certain quality, size and price were not being observed. Often such action was taken against new commercial processes and was somewhat backward-looking in its focus. Thompson defined this impetus as ‘the moral economy of the crowd’. He argued further that:

While this moral economy cannot be described as ‘political’ in any advanced sense, nevertheless it cannot be described as unpolitical either, since it supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the **common weal** – notions which, indeed, found some support in the paternalist tradition of the authorities; notions which the people re-echoed so loudly in their turn that the authorities were, in some measure, the prisoners of the people. Hence this moral economy impinged very generally upon eighteenth-century government and thought, and did not only intrude at moments of disturbance.

(Thompson, 1993, pp. 188–9)

Later in the essay Thompson argued that in major ‘risings of the people’ what is remarkable ‘is, first, their discipline, and second, the fact that they exhibit a pattern of behaviour for whose origin we must look back several hundreds of years: which becomes more, rather than less, sophisticated in the eighteenth century’. He claimed that the focus of such action was ‘setting the price’, rather than random violence and the pilfering of grain, and that the source of such action could be found in the Elizabethan era: ‘What is extraordinary about this pattern is that it reproduces ... the emergency measures in time of scarcity

whose operation, in the years between 1580 and 1630, were codified in the *Book of Orders*'. (Books of orders were instructions to magistrates on how to carry out the orders given by the crown on social and economic matters, in this case in relation to times of scarcity.)

According to Thompson, then, methods for keeping prices for grain low and fair for 'the poorer sort' stretched back centuries (Thompson, 1993, pp. 224–5).

Thompson's reinterpretation of popular action was groundbreaking. While he focused primarily on grain riots in eighteenth-century Britain, other historians have applied his thesis to other times, places and types of action, such as the medieval period and the nineteenth century, in France, America and India, and incorporating industrial or political conflicts (Randall and Charlesworth, 2000, pp. 19–32). Others have warned that popular action did not always have one clear cause; people joined in for multiple reasons and from various positions in society: they did not always share a legitimising purpose. Many have challenged Thompson's **grand narrative**; that is, the suggestion that grain riots formed an 'unbroken continuum from the sixteenth century to the late eighteenth' (Wood, 2002, p. 98). John Bohstedt has argued that while Thompson's thesis is important, rioters were often less orderly and focused on custom and tradition than Thompson suggested. For example, food rioters in 1740–66 were not disciplined and focused on 'setting the price' but rather more on seizing grain and damaging property. These riots 'were about physical supplies more than market morality' (Bohstedt, 2000, p. 62). John Walter has stressed the importance of viewing crowd action within appropriate local contexts and as part of a broadly political dialogue between people and authorities (Walter, 2006, pp. 10–11). Yet Thompson's moral economy thesis is still widely recognised as important and provides a helpful starting point for analysis (Randall, 2006, pp. 303–31).

One major challenge to Thompson's thesis comes from William Beik, who argues that violence was a more significant part of riots than Thompson's moral economy. In an article on French crowds, Beik starts with a question:

When common people protested in early modern France, they employed language and behaviour that strike us as violent and destructive. Peasants, craftsmen, labourers, women, even children resorted to collective violence. Houses were torn apart, authorities threatened, scapegoats beaten and dragged through the streets.

How are we to evaluate these actions? Any attempt requires imaginative reconstruction of rioters' intentions based on titbits of information gleaned from many sources. In the best of cases we have reports from several observers with differing points of view ... Occasionally we have transcripts of the testimony of rioters in judicial interrogations, as recorded by unsympathetic scribes. The only way to arrive at the intentions of the demonstrators is to piece together clues from their slogans, assertions and gestures, and combine them with the logic suggested by a carefully reconstructed sequence of events. When common expressions or parallel tactics and targets appear repeatedly in different times and in multiple revolts, confidence grows that there is a decipherable language involved.

(Beik, 2007, p. 75)

Beik points out the difficulties of recapturing what people thought they were doing, for example the idea that they were all acting on a legitimising notion. Sources are scarce and incomplete because few rioters recorded their motivation for taking part. You have come across this issue concerning reliable sources and interpretation through symbolic actions earlier in the chapter. Beik suggests we may need to use the rioters' symbolic actions as evidence.

Beik also rejects arguments that riots were focused around lost traditions, claiming that:

Groups of relatively disenfranchised individuals from the middle to lower ranks of a local community, but lacking any formal institutional identity, would mobilize either spontaneously or after informal meetings and discussions, to attack an abuse of power by those in authority. I called such a movement an expression of the 'culture of retribution'. The common feature of these riots was the crowd's desire to punish the authorities for abuse of power. This aspect was shared by riots with a variety of other objectives and trajectories. The element of vengeance distinguishes the 'culture of retribution' from E.P. Thompson's concept of the 'moral economy of the crowd' in that it highlights the desire to punish the audacity or negligence of people who should have known better, whereas the moral economy emphasizes the crowd's reimposition of traditional norms and procedures. This popular impulse to punish was certainly primitive, but nevertheless it

seemed to be political in the sense that it was a commentary by protesters on the behaviour of people of higher status who should have taken more care in looking out for the needs of the lesser members of the community. Like the 'moral economy', it was an expression of moral outrage. But what was distinctive in these French instances was the vindictive aspect. The riot was not simply an attempt to oppose a novelty or correct an abuse. It was a focused and very dynamic move to humiliate or harm the responsible parties.

(Beik, 2007, pp. 76–7)

In his conclusion Beik argues that:

The 'culture of retribution' is a relatively loose concept encompassing a range of activities from small attacks on offending officials to highly ritualized draggings and hangings. Its merit is that it highlights a predilection on the part of common people to intervene actively when basic values seemed threatened. These protesters cannot be forced into a particular ideological mould or historical model. They intervened directly in matters that can only be called political to defend interests which were sometimes, by our standards, progressive, sometimes backward-looking and conservative. The people of early modern France were not primitives prone to brutality and violence, as pessimistic observers would have it, because much of their violence was measured and symbolic. ... their tactics were politically informed and sensitive to particular circumstances.

(Beik, 2007, pp. 106–7)

Online session 16.3

Now go to the module website and complete online session 16.3. This should take around 40 minutes.

So, can we reconcile Thompson's and Beik's interpretations? Is there any common ground? I can synthesise the two approaches by suggesting that while the people taking part in protests or riots might

have been invoking a moral economy and/or a culture of retribution, either way they were taking assertive action where they felt the need to defend their rights or position over an issue. They might have committed hideous violent acts against people or property in a moment of retributive fury or in the heat of the moment, but by so doing they would have drawn attention to their demands; they would certainly have made their voices heard. Can we say they gained agency through violence? Possibly, if their demands were met. The political philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883) believed that the working class would gain agency through revolution: inevitably a violent uprising. But on the other hand violence could prove self-defeating for the people, as the evidence you have studied suggests. Where crowds engaged in serious violence, local authorities felt that they could no longer ameliorate conditions but must suppress and prosecute rioters. You saw this in Beik's Sisteron example in online session 16.3 – and think back to Hindle's point on English riots, quoted in section 16.2 of this chapter (Hindle, 2002, pp. 1–2), that authorities would attempt to redress grievances except where there was serious violence and then they would punish those involved.

Exercise 16.6

Think back over the examples you have studied throughout this chapter and consider the following questions:

- How far might you associate them with a moral economy and/or a violent culture of retribution?
- Do the examples of popular action suggest that communities always gained agency?

This should take around 20 minutes.

Discussion

- Although E. P. Thompson was focusing primarily on grain and bread riots we can, along with other historians, broaden that out to include other cases where people perceived there had been a lack of respect of social norms and obligations. From this point of view, the skimmington and customary rituals may be regarded as having a legitimising notion. You might decide that such actions fitted with Thompson's thesis, either to some extent or entirely. To a certain extent, the Naples Revolt and the silk-weavers' riots also fit the Thompson thesis. Many popular actions, riots and revolts involved varying degrees of violence, but the extent to which this fits with

William Beik's culture of retribution is open to debate. Beik has identified this culture as possibly distinctively French, but, as you have learned, violence against authorities was common in riots elsewhere too, including Italy, Portugal and Britain. It is important to consider what role violence played in particular riots and protests, and at what stage – and who was reporting it. We may need to consider if violence was a last resort, or suggested a desire for revenge against authorities who had 'betrayed' the people in some way. We might identify the *pulhas* (discussed in online session 16.1) with a culture of retribution, and perhaps some of the actions by silk-weavers too. But this is not always clear-cut, and you need to carefully analyse the evidence in applying these two theses.

- You probably came up with plenty of examples of the people gaining a voice and agency. But you may also have thought of others where they did not achieve their aims and may even have been penalised for their actions. In some cases protestors perhaps gained a voice but not agency, as with Jacobitism.
-

More broadly, you may also have noted that there was some sense of reciprocity between the rulers and ruled throughout early modern Europe, with the people expecting that those above them would, or should, recognise their customary rights and needs. Indeed, there were clearly mechanisms in place to alleviate hardship in response to popular protests. Somewhat contradictorily perhaps, the sources also reveal much condemnation of the people as the 'mob' or the 'rabble', and this rather belies the more conciliatory responses often adopted by authorities. Sometimes of course this would have been prompted by fear, but it does suggest enduring derogatory attitudes towards the people; clearly there was no sense of equality here. Moreover, in some cases, such as Jacobitism, no sense of reciprocity or conciliation is suggested in the sources.

Conclusion

The historiography and examples of popular action and riot that you have studied in this chapter provide much food for thought. They show that popular action took many different forms, from the local charivari and calendric ritual to widespread political or economic protests, riots and revolts. Protests could remain within a small community or spread over regions. Jacobitism had a broad reach around the British Isles and Ireland, while the Revolt of Naples spread from the city throughout the kingdom of Naples and beyond, and grain riots occurred regularly across Europe. You have seen that protestors would commonly claim public spaces, both urban and rural, to make their presence felt and get their voices heard.

Historians have increasingly tried to understand such popular action from different perspectives and within different contexts. Those taking part in popular action would rarely record this in writing, and evidence of their perspective is thin on the ground, as Rogers, Wilson and Beik have noted. Beik has argued that in view of the lack of direct popular evidence it is often necessary to piece together clues from slogans, gestures and actions. Rogers, Howkins and Merricks, and Bushaway have also stressed the importance of symbolic actions – disguise, wearing badges, rough music, songs, dance and so on – that can be identified in many of the sources here. Such action helped the people to gain a voice, express their allegiance, make an impact and gain agency.

Finally, some conclusion may be drawn about continuity and change. Did the forms or frequency of riots change over our period? It is hard to answer that question, especially when taking in the whole of Europe, as political and social structures varied considerably. But the evidence suggests that while popular protest may, later in the period, have spread more quickly and over wider areas due to better communications, the causes of protest remained similar. Grain riots were common throughout the period, as were protests over taxation, the erosion of perceived popular rights and moral community issues, all of which prompted popular action intermittently. But it is important not to clump such action together into one grand narrative – the fundamental cause may have been similar but the circumstances and context would always vary from time to time and place to place. Moreover, as the Revolt of Naples illustrates, protests could erupt over

one issue and then change course and focus on another. And as Jacobitism shows, a protest related to a particular event or issue could recur over some years. Early modern popular action took place both annually on nominated calendar days, and sporadically over days, weeks or years. Returning to the starting point of this chapter, it is clear that popular protest continued to occur throughout Europe and remained one of the most effective ways people had to make their voices heard and to bring about change.

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Readings

Reading 16.1 Midon, 'The preface by way of introduction'

Source: Midon, F. (1729) *The History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello, the Fisherman of Naples*, London, pp. 4–5.

The Royal City of *Naples* is full of People, and many Families were undone by the Weight of Taxes; but this Gabel upon Fruit was the greatest Grievance, and they resolved not to indure it ... the Citizens of *Lavinaro*, and other Quarters, placed themselves in Companies as [the Duke of Acros, Viceroy of the Kingdom] passed upon a Day thro' the Market-Place, to pay his Devotion ... at the Church of the *Carmelites*, and petitioned him in a Body, to remit the Tax. The Viceroy feeling himself surrounded by such a Multitude of Men, Women and Children, who, with uplifted Hands, begg'd Relief, was forced, to appease them, to stop his Coach and promise that in a Day or two he would give them Satisfaction. Upon the *Sunday* following as he was going to the Church aforesaid, he observed a great Disorder and Murmuring among the People; who did not petition him as before, but peremptorily demanded a Release of the Tax, and threatened him in case of Denial: These were Presages of the Commotions that followed. The Viceroy was so terrified, that he promised to take off the Gabel, and return'd with such Apprehensions of Fear to his Palace

[p. 5]

Reading 16.2 Midon, On 7 July 1647

Source: Midon, F. (1729) *The History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello, the Fisherman of Naples*, London, pp. 27–33.

7th July 1647

The Rabble flocked together in great Numbers, as well in the Market-place as in other Quarters of the City... *Masaniello* put himself at the Head of them: He was followed by an infinite Number of Boys, and all Sorts of loose People; some were armed with Sticks, others with Pikes and Javelins ... And thus surrounded with his ragged Regiments, he leaped up on the highest Table among the Fruiterers, and demanding Silence, he made this Harangue: *Rejoice, my dear Companions and Countrymen; give God thanks, ... that the Hour of our Redemption, and*

[p. 28]

[p. 29] *the Time of our Deliverance draweth near: This poor Fisherman, bare-footed as he is, shall, as another Moses ... free you from all Gabels and Impositions that were ever laid upon you. It was a Fisherman, I mean St. Peter, who reduced the City of Rome from the Slavery of the Devil to the Liberty of Christ Now another Fisherman, one Masaniello, I am the Man, shall release the city of Naples; and with it the whole Kingdom from the cruel Yoke of Tolls and Gabels. Shake off, therefore, from this Moment the Yoke be free, if you have but Courage, from those intolerable Oppressions, under which you have hitherto groaned*

This ... was received by the People with universal Applause ... they declared, they were ready to follow where-ever he would lead them ...

[p. 30] This Action alarmed the whole City, the Mob increased in every Street, the Citizens shut up their Shops, for Fear of being plunder'd ; and many of them joined in the Riot, that they might have a Share of the Spoil. All Things were in the utmost Confusion ; the People divided themselves into several Companies, and [went] to several Quarters where the Gabel-Houses lay; these they attacked: The Toll-Houses of Fruit, of Corn, Flesh, Fish, Salt, Wine, Oil, Cheese, Silk, of every Thing that was either to be eaten or worn, were broke open, not one of them was spared; they took out of them all the Books of Accounts and Entrance that belonged to the several Gabels, and all the Furniture ... fine Hangings, Chairs, Arms, great Quantities of Money, with other valuable and rich Moveables, Forms, Tables, Stools, all was thrown into a great fire made of Straw for that Purpose, and consum'd to Ashes in the Street. ...

[p. 31]

[p. 32] Being come to the Palace, and placing themselves under the Window of the Viceroy, they began to be rude and noisy, and demanded ... to be freed not only from the Tax upon Fruit, but from all other Gabels

[p. 33] [taxes] whatever; especially that laid upon Corn. The Viceroy ... complied with them so far as to abolish wholly the Gabel upon Fruit, and Part of the Corn Tax also: But this Indulgence rather enraged than pacified the People: They cried out, they would not be relieved by Halves, but the Whole ... Then they pressed hard upon the Palace-Gate, which they forced in Defiance of the *German* and *Spanish* Guards.

Reading 16.3 Midon on sources

Source: Midon, F. (1729) *The History of the Rise and Fall of Masaniello, the Fisherman of Naples*, London, pp. vii–xi.

There is scarce any Part of History which we have a less tolerable Account of than of this. Several Authors have indeed treated on this Subject, in French, in Latin and in Italian: But many of them, byassed [biased] by this, or by that Party, have written as their opposite Interests suggested to them, and by an unjust Partiality, represented Things to the Advantage only of that particular Faction they adhered to. ... [p. viii]

I have consulted the best Memoirs and Manuscripts I could light upon; but, as they are very scarce, and for the most Part quite unknown to an English Reader, I think it altogether unnecessary to mention them. ... I have endeavoured to set forth the History of Masaniello in its true and genuine Light ... I have chiefly studied to avoid the Imputation of Partiality which other Writers upon this Subject have been so justly taxed with. [p. ix]
[p. x]
[p. xi]

Glossary

Aristotelian natural philosophy

the systematic knowledge of the physical world as proposed in the works of Aristotle (384-322 BC), one of the most influential Greek philosophers.

cast iron

an alloy of iron and carbon, hard and relatively brittle, that can be easily cast in a mould.

chapbooks

a type of small publications mainly consisting of popular tales often circulated by itinerant dealers or chapmen.

church courts

courts enforcing canon (ecclesiastical) law through disciplinary prosecutions.

college of physicians

originally similar to a guild for physicians, this body became more elitist, restricting membership to select physicians and exercising control over all medical practitioners.

common weal

the general, public welfare of a community.

commonwealth

the body of people constituting a community or a state, in which they have an interest.

conduct books

a genre of publications which aim to instruct readers on how to behave.

confession

the religious doctrine considered essential by a church and shared by the members of that church; the word is used to indicate each of the different forms of Christianity after the Reformation; the term also means the religious act of acknowledging one's sins in front of a priest.

coppicing

the periodical cutting down of trees so that new shoots may grow from the stumps.

deference

a behaviour shaped by the respectful submission to those considered superior.

deposition

a testimony given upon oath in a court of law.

enclosure

the changing of the status of pieces of land, so that they passed from common or shared ownership into the hands of a single owner. This often involved physically enclosing or fencing off the area.

English civil wars

see entry for Wars of the three Kingdoms.

Enlightenment

a European intellectual movement of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasising reason and individualism rather than traditional sources of authority.

episcopal

a form of a church organisation based on government by bishops.

excommunication

the act of banning people from receiving holy communion as a form of punishment when their behaviour was deemed unacceptable.

gender

a category used from the 1970s to discuss the multiple cultural and social meanings attributed to sexual differences (i.e., the anatomical and physiological differences between the sexes) in different societies. Gender studies focus on the factors that shape male and female identity and roles; the assumption is that masculinity and femininity are historically specific.

gentry

group of people immediately below the rank of nobility.

ghetto

the area in cities where the Jews were confined.

grand narrative

a comprehensive explanation of historical processes which highlights the role of deep and broad factors over a long period.

heretical

holding theological or religious views at variance with the orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church; in the Middle Ages many heretic groups were prosecuted.

Holy Communion

the bread and wine administered at a communion service to the laity by the minister in Protestant churches or the bread administered at mass to the laity by Catholic priests; the wine was only taken by the priest. Also known as the Eucharist, it was instituted by Christ at the Last Supper.

incarnation

the act by which God assumed existence in the human form through the birth of Christ.

Inquisition

the ecclesiastical courts in charge of the investigation and prosecution of religious heresies in Catholic countries. The most important one was in Rome and was also known as the Holy Office.

kinship

the system of social relationships supporting individuals and based on descent and marriage.

libertinism

a cultural movement which flourished especially in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth century; its supporters shared scepticism towards any religious beliefs and the celebration of free sexual mores; the word is also used more generally to mean the praise and practice of male sexual freedom.

lithotomists

medical practitioners who specialised in the removal of bladder stones.

mercantilism

the dominant economic theory in the early modern period; it was based on the assumption that a nation's wealth is increased when export of goods exceeds the import, allowing the build up of monetary reserve. It was associated with government interventions to promote national manufacturing and restrict imports through tariffs.

miasma

air rising from putrefying matter or other polluted sources that was thought to cause disease.

middling sort

people who earned their living through a range of occupations and enjoyed a status between that of the noble and wealthy elite and that of the poor.

monopoly

exclusive command or possession of an economic activity.

morbidity

the rate and frequency of disease in a given area or period.

mystic

one who seeks or attains direct intercourse with God during elevated religious feelings.

Papal States

the territories of the Italian peninsula under the political rule of the Pope.

patronage

various forms of support, protection, help in getting jobs, and other forms of aid offered by individuals to those lower down the social scale, thus creating networks of obligations.

petition

a written request to an authority, usually with the aim of redressing perceived injustice.

Presbyterianism

part of the Reformed tradition in which the church is governed by elders including ministers and laypeople.

Privy Council

a formal body of advisers to the sovereigns of England.

prophecy

to proclaim a divine message because directly inspired by God; to foretell the future.

purgatory

a place to which Roman Catholics believe that the spirits of dead people go and suffer for the evil acts that they did while they were alive, before they are able to go to heaven.

qualitative analysis

the study of historical processes and events that focuses on their properties and characters.

quantitative analysis

the study of historical processes and events that examines their measurable components.

Restoration

the period heralded by the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 after the end of the Protectorate (1649–60) which followed the English civil wars of 1642–9. The Restoration period is generally considered to have ended with the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

seigneur

the French term for 'a Lord'.

symbolic

based on the use of objects and devices that by convention represent something else.

tabernacle

a temporary place of worship; a decorated place where the consecrated wafer of the Eucharist is held.

Tories

the name given to those who opposed the exclusion of James Duke of York from the succession to the throne of England in the late 1670s. From 1689, this was the name given to members of one of the two parliamentary and political parties in England; the party supported a strong monarchy.

Trinity

the unity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost which is a tenet of orthodox Christianity.

Venn diagram

a diagram in which sets and their relationships are represented by circles; the name comes from the mathematician John Venn (1834–1923).

vocation

God's calling to exercise a religious function; more generally, the natural disposition someone may have to an activity or one's occupation and business.

Wars of the Three Kingdoms

a series of conflicts fought in the British Isles between 1639 and 1651 over forms of government and religious issues. These included the English civil wars and conflict in Scotland and Ireland.

witchcraft

practices based on sorcery and enchantments which may involve the intervention of the devil or evil spirits; belief in and practice of witchcraft were common in the early modern period.

wrought iron

malleable iron containing a small amount of other elements and which can be easily welded; used especially for ornamental works.

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